

## US efforts continue

US Middle East peace coordinator Dennis Ross was in the region this week trying to push the peace process out of its deadlock, reports Nevine Khalil. Yesterday, President Hosni Mubarak held talks with Ross on subjects including the Middle East/North Africa economic summit (MENA II), scheduled for November, and the faltering Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese tracks. "The discussions were fruitful," Ross said after the meeting, which was attended by Mubarak's top political adviser, Osama El-Baz.

Ross arrived in Egypt to discuss preparations for the upcoming regional economic conference, which Egypt had threatened to cancel or postpone if Israel continued to drag its feet in advancing the peace process.

Before going to Alexandria for talks with Mubarak, Ross was in Cairo meeting Foreign Minister Amr Moussa for almost two hours on Tuesday night. He would not disclose any of the ideas currently being discussed to find ways of persuading the parties to the peace process to resume their negotiations, only saying he had "good discussions and we will continue to work very closely together" with the Egyptians. "We will make every effort to make the peace process move forward," Ross told reporters.

Asked by *Al-Ahram Weekly* whether the ideas Ross came to the region with would be conducive to activating the peace process, Moussa said that it "all depends on the reaction of [Israeli Prime Minister] Benjamin Netanyahu's government."

Asked whether recent statements by Cairo confirming the convening of MENA II now renders the issue of holding the conference irrelevant as a bargaining chip, Moussa said: "Why should we take anything out of the equation? Let everything be in the equation."

Moussa again took Netanyahu to task for his uncooperative attitude that Egypt was "cutting off its nose to spite its face" by threatening to call off the summit. "These statements poison the air more," Moussa said. "[They] are unacceptable, unhelpful and reflect disregard for the peace process and the role of Egypt." Egypt's foreign minister said further that Israel resorted to "language I believe it will regret."

Ross also met Palestinian President Yasser Arafat in the Gaza Strip yesterday, and will go on to Israel for discussions with Netanyahu. (see p. 2)

## Settlements expanded

ISRAELI Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai has approved a plan to build 1,800 more homes in a Jewish settlement in the occupied West Bank, drawing fire from Palestinian officials and Israeli peace activists.

News of Mordechai's decision, described by his office as approval of plans which had been ratified and then frozen by the previous Labour-led government, broke hours before he was due to meet Palestinian President Yasser Arafat for the first time in Gaza yesterday. At their meeting, Arafat planned to urge Israel's defence minister to carry out a troop redeployment in the West Bank town of Hebron and stop expanding Jewish settlements.

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# Turkey's zone claim

Turkey will not maintain a permanent military presence in the so-called Danger Zone which it is establishing along the Iraqi side of the border, says President Demirel. He spoke in an exclusive interview to *Omayma Abdel-Latif* in Ankara

The 'Danger Zone' which Turkey is planning to establish along the Iraqi side of its south-eastern border will be monitored by intelligence and surveillance, and not a permanent military presence, President Suleiman Demirel told *Al-Ahram Weekly* in an exclusive interview.

Speaking at his office in Ankara's Cankaya Kosko presidential palace, Demirel said the area, five to 15 kilometres wide, was designed to ward off attacks by the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

Wearing a dark business suit, Demirel spoke in English to the *Weekly's* correspondent, who flew to Ankara to interview him. After welcoming the *Weekly's* correspondent, Demirel remarked that "your president [Hosni Mubarak] is a dear friend of mine."

Asked whether Turkey was going ahead with plans to establish the Security Zone, Demirel replied bluntly: "Yes. The latest developments have created an atmosphere for the PKK to play rough shod in northern Iraq. The PKK will try to infiltrate our borders in order to carry out cross-border attacks and step up its terror campaign."

These developments, he said, made it necessary for Turkey "to take a series of appropriate measures in order to maintain its own security and protect innocent civilians. So, within this context, we decided to consider an area running parallel to our border with a width of five to 15km, depending upon the geographical situation, as a temporary Danger Zone."

Demirel made it clear that "there will be no permanent military presence in this zone, but it will be kept under control by various means of intelligence and surveillance." He argued that this measure "will in no way infringe upon Iraq's sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity."

He rejected any comparison between the Turkish plan and the so-called security zone established by Israel in southern Lebanon. "We only want to keep our borders protected and not to occupy Iraqi land," he said.

Demirel charged that Syria was continuing to provide support for the PKK, thus hindering what he called "meaningful cooperation" between the two countries.

"Syrian officials claim that the PKK presence in Syria is not tolerated, but we have evidence that the leaders of this organisation are still residing in Syria," he said. "So Syrian support for the PKK continues unabated and the number of terrorist infiltrations into Turkey have increased in the last 12 months."

He had, he maintained, raised the issue repeatedly with Syrian President Hafez El-

Assad, urging him "to take the necessary measures to prevent terrorist activities directed at Turkey from Syrian territories." While affirming Turkey's desire to "maintain friendly relations and promote cooperation with Syria," he added that "if a neighbour is supporting bloodshed, it should be blamed for this bloodshed."

Demirel said Turkey followed developments in Iraq "with deep concern," affirming his belief that "foreign intervention will only further complicate the situation."

Describing the American strikes against Iraq as "part of the Gulf crisis," Demirel said Turkey did not take a position. "We did not condemn or approve... There is a fight and Turkey does not want to be involved. We do not have any problems with the Iraqis. Iraq's problems are with others: the United States, Britain and France." He added that the US-led coalition, including Turkey, which had driven Iraqi forces out of Kuwait in 1991, has since been disbanded.

Asked whether Turkey would allow its airbases to be used by American warplanes for new strikes against Iraq, Demirel said the issue had not been discussed during a visit by US Defence Secretary William Perry to Ankara.

Pressed as to how Turkey would respond if the United States requested the use of its bases, Demirel said: "It depends on which part of Iraq they want to attack." He expressed the belief, however, that America would not strike again at northern Iraq "because there is no need to."

Demirel maintained that a military training cooperation agreement which Turkey signed with Israel did not signal the birth of a military alliance between them. "There is no Israeli-Turkish military alliance, nor will there be one in the future, because there is no need for it," he said. "Whom should we ally against? Our brotherly Arab countries? There is no threat coming from any Arab country against Turkey."

He insisted that "the military training cooperation agreement between Turkey and Israel is solely a training agreement and this accord is not against any third party." He pointed out that similar training agreements had been signed with eight Arab countries and Iran.

In response to a question about Syria's concerns, Demirel said that Turkey's relations with Israel were "not meant to create hostility with other countries... The Syrian concerns may emanate from being misinformed, or from miscalculating the situation. We have told the Syrians many times that this accord was not made against them." (Full text, p.6)



SUMMER is nearly over — though one wouldn't know it from the heat — and across the land, parents of school children are torn between relief and anxiety. On Saturday the kids will be finally getting back to school and out of their

parents hair, but at a cost. Uniforms, books, stationary and school fees are only the beginning. As the school year gets on, private tutoring, the scourge of the Egyptian education system will take a much greater toll on families' pocket books.

# New mufti nomination

Wonder about the post of the Grand Mufti of the Republic, vacant for nearly six months, may soon cease. *Mona El-Nahhas* discovers the identity of a judicial nominee

Dr El-Bayoumi Mohamed El-Bayoumi, deputy chief justice of the Administrative Court, is to be appointed Grand Mufti of the Republic within the next few days, sources from Al-Azhar Mosque told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. The sources, who asked to remain anonymous, said the nomination had already been made by Justice Minister Farouq Seif El-Nasr, but needs the approval of President Hosni Mubarak. The mufti's appointment is made by a presidential decree.

However, scholars at Al-Azhar did not seem too happy with the choice, on the grounds that although El-Bayoumi is a graduate of Al-Azhar, Islam's highest theological institute, he has not had any connection with the institute since his graduation more than 25 years ago. Some Azharites object to the government appointment of the mufti, arguing that political considerations could influence the choice. The view has even been advanced that the mufti's post is redundant because Al-Azhar has a special committee for passing *fatwas*.

The post has been vacant since last March when President Mubarak assigned the former mufti, Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, to serve as the grand shaykh of Al-Azhar. The sources said Tantawi had recommended El-Bayoumi as his successor.

The sources attributed the delay in appointing the new mufti to a meticulous search for the right person. "The post carries a heavy responsibility. It is the mufti who conveys God's orders to the Islamic nation. Hence, the person who occupies this post should be carefully chosen, no matter how much time it may take," a source said.

The 52-year-old mufti-nominee joined the Al-Azhar school system at the age of 11, graduating from Al-Azhar's Faculty of *Shari'a* (Islamic law) in 1970. He obtained a doctorate in law and *shari'a* from Cairo University in 1983. For the past three years, he has served as deputy chief justice of the Administrative Court.

"All of us hope the new mufti will act to serve Islam and not to please senior officials," said Abdullah Abdel-Halil, dean of Al-Azhar's Faculty of Islamic Studies in Beni Suef. In addition to mastering *shari'a* and *fiqh* (jurisprudence), the mufti should have a wide experience in passing *fatwas*. He should also be pious, courageous and trustworthy, Abdel-Halil said.

Yehia Ismail, professor of *hadith* (Prophet Mohamed's sayings) at Al-Azhar, said that Al-Azhar, not the government, should be responsible for filling this religious post.

"The mufti should be chosen by Al-Azhar scholars, and not any governmental body, to guarantee that his religious opinions are not politically motivated," he argued.

Abdel-Moneim El-Berri, deputy chairman of Al-Azhar's Scholars Association, shared this view. He was also dubious

about the need for a mufti at all, pointing out that Al-Azhar has a special authority for passing *fatwas*. As a compromise, El-Berri recommended close coordination between this Azharite authority and the mufti.

Ahmed Taha Rayan, a professor of jurisprudence at Al-Azhar, and a possible candidate for the post, had made it clear from the beginning that he would not accept it. He said that guarantees were necessary to ensure the independence of the mufti.

*Dar Al-Ifta'* (the mufti's office) was established in 1896 with Sheikh Mohamed Abdou, a great Islamic reformer, as its head. The mufti's original task was to make sure that death sentences passed by criminal courts were in line with Islamic *shari'a*. He was also responsible for determining the start of the months of the *Hijra* (Islamic lunar) calendar. His duties have now been expanded to include responding to religious inquiries made by Muslims seeking to make sure their daily conduct does not violate the teachings of religion.

For the first half of this century, the mufti was chosen by Al-Azhar Scholars' Association. But the practice was stopped in the late 1950s, and the minister of justice is now responsible for the nomination, following consultations with the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar. The appointment requires a presidential decree.

"It was not a well-thought out step," he said, commenting on his dismissal. He was especially disappointed that the culture minister had issued his dismissal decision while he was abroad attending a conference. "He could have waited for me to come back," Noureddin said. As for the attempted robbery at the Egyptian Museum, Noureddin remarked bitterly, "if they must have a scapegoat, why does it have to be me?"

The new head of the SCA is looking towards Alexandria. "My dream, which I will work hard to turn into reality, is to put the city of Alexandria on the tourist map by restoring and cleaning its archaeological sites," Hassan said. He specifically mentioned the sites of the old Alexandria Library, Pompeii's Pillar, the Catascombs and the Graeco-Roman Museum.

Acknowledging that some monuments needed urgent repairs, Hassan said, "My new policy will give priority to the restoration of antiquities all over Egypt." he said. (see p.2)

Noureddin, in remarks to the *Weekly*, claimed he had been, for some time, resisting "intense" pressures to force him to resign.

## New head for antiquities

Ali Hassan, the new secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), says his dream is to put the Mediterranean city of Alexandria on the tourist map by giving a face-lift to its archaeological sites. Hassan, speaking to Nevine El-Aref, also said that he will give priority to the restoration of ancient monuments since many of them are in dire need of repair.

Hassan, who previously served as chief of the Pharaonic Antiquities Department of the SCA, was elevated to secretary-general following the dismissal of Abdel-Halim Noureddin. Although no reason was officially given for the dismissal, it followed a failed attempt to rob priceless items from the Egyptian Museum's Tutankhamun collection. SCA sources also cited chronic differences between Noureddin, originally a faculty of archaeology professor, and Culture Minister Farouk Hosni.

Noureddin, in remarks to the *Weekly*, claimed he had been, for some time, resisting "intense" pressures to force him to resign.

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## Veteran journalist dies

ABBAS Mabrouk, head of *Al-Ahram's* science department, died on Tuesday of a diabetic coma and heart failure. Mabrouk, 61, who was also *Al-Ahram's* assistant chief editor, obtained a bachelor's degree in journalism from Cairo University in 1959 and then joined the Middle East News Agency (MENA) as a science reporter. In 1964, he worked for *Cairo* newspaper for several months, after which he began his job at *Al-Ahram*.



Throughout his career, Mabrouk focused on scientific issues with a human aspect. He took part in fund-raising campaigns launched by *Al-Ahram*, the revenue of which was used to establish several medical units.

Mabrouk paid special attention to Egypt's environment and was allocated a weekly page in *Al-Ahram* to cover environmental issues. He acted as the page editor for two years. He was also the chief editor of *Al-Ahram's* *Al-Qadim* magazine, published by the Environmental Affairs Association.

## Con-man cons minister

SECURITY sources say they have discovered the identity of the prankster who misled Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni, taking him into the hills around Aswan to look for "treasures". The sources say he will be arrested soon.

On 11 September, a young man dressed in blue jeans entered the minister's office after submitting an identity card to the police officer in charge of Hosni's security. He insisted on meeting the minister, claiming that he had discovered valuable archaeological treasure in the hills near Aswan.

Investigations have shown that the identity card had been tampered with. Lost by its original owner six months ago, the trickster had found the card and stuck his own photograph on it.

Immediately after meeting the young man, the minister phoned senior officials at the Tourist Police and told them what he had heard. The young man was summoned to the Tourist Police office, where he spent the whole night undergoing a thorough investigation.

Deciding that his story was plausible, a group including police officers and senior officials from the Supreme Council for Antiquities accompanied the man to Aswan on Thursday morning to examine the treasure. It was decided that the minister would catch up with them a few hours later. But when he reached Aswan he was told there was no treasure and that the young man had disappeared.

## Militants killed in sugar cane field

POLICE shot dead two suspected Islamist militants on Tuesday in a gun battle on the edge of a sugar cane field in the southern governorate of Minya, an Interior Ministry statement said.

According to the statement, the militants had shot at a police convoy between the southern villages of Safay and Gamaliya, some 240km south of Cairo. The police returned fire and the bodies of the two unidentified men were found among the sugar cane. Police also found two automatic rifles and several rounds of ammunition.

The Interior Ministry has also announced that a police officer, Lt. Tamer Salah Abdel-Hamid, died in a fall on Sunday during a search for militants. The body of the policeman was found in Sahel Setim, in the Assiut governorate, 320km south of Cairo. Last week, eight civilians and a policeman were killed in clashes in the area. Police later arrested seven suspects.

## Death in a tin container

AN EGYPTIAN stowaway died this week after he tried to escape from his Saudi employer by smuggling himself out of the country in a box on board a ferry from Jeddah to Suez, Egyptian police said. A friend at Jeddah port helped get the tin container onto the boat, but the man was unable to open it later due to a large amount of luggage that had been placed on top.

The man, identified as Mohamed Ibrahim Abdel-Hadi, had been working as a driver in Saudi Arabia, but had a dispute with his employer who, as permitted by regulations in the kingdom, kept his passport to prevent him from leaving. Police said they found food, water and a battery-operated fan inside the container, which Abdel-Hadi had prepared for the two-day journey.

More than one million Egyptians are reportedly working in Saudi Arabia, replacing thousands of Palestinian and Yemeni workers who were expelled from the kingdom because of the support their governments expressed for Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait. One of the main problems Egyptian workers face in Saudi Arabia is Saudi employers holding onto their passports to prevent them from leaving the country in case of a dispute.

# MENA on a merry-go-round

Although Cairo is going ahead with plans for a regional economic summit, it found itself embroiled this week in a fresh war of words with Israel. Nevine Khalil reports

An exchange of verbal tirades between Egypt and Israel threatened to aggravate tension in bilateral relations this week but is not likely to influence plans for a regional economic summit in November. Although President Hosni Mubarak made it clear that the third Middle East/North Africa Summit (MENA III) would be held on schedule, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu launched a verbal tirade against Cairo for previously threatening to postpone or cancel the summit.

"We are not seriously listening to these things," Netanyahu told Israel Radio on Sunday, in reference to Egypt's announcement three weeks ago that it would be "impossible" for the summit to convene if Israel did not redeploy its troops in Hebron — a long-delayed move which has overshoot its scheduled date by months.

"To threaten us with the cancellation of the Cairo conference is like a man who cuts off his nose to spite his face," Netanyahu said. He added that it was in Egypt's interest to hold the summit, but if it "doesn't want to hold the economic conference, let it not seek political excuses. I do not advise anyone to use tools like this against us. It will also be of no help."

The statements ruffled tempers in Cairo. An editorial in an Arabic-language newspaper said that it was Netanyahu "who should cut off his own nose, ear or tongue." For his part, Mubarak firmly told Israeli tele-

vision that it was in fact Netanyahu who stood to suffer if the summit was cancelled or postponed. "We need some confidence-building here," Mubarak said.

On Tuesday Foreign Minister Amr Moussa was more blunt: "[Netanyahu] had better stay away from Egypt's nose, so Egypt stays away from him." While saying it was "unfortunate" that Netanyahu had made his remarks, Moussa said that the summit would be held on schedule. "There are seven weeks left and we hope that this period will be used to aid peace and not destroy it," he added.

Meanwhile, progress in the peace process was not forthcoming and Arab ministers meeting in Cairo under the umbrella of the Arab League apparently did not address the issue of the economic summit. Syria's Foreign Minister Farouk El-Shara said, however, that there was a "consensus to link Arab normalization with Israel to progress in the peace process." Shara also spoke of Syria's desire that the Arabs freeze their participation in multilateral talks with Israel.

After weeks of conflicting signals from Cairo, Mubarak said he was "determined to hold the summit as scheduled," but this would require the US and Israel to work hard on reviving the peace process. "We are not calling the summit off, but [Israel and the US] have to help us," Mubarak told reporters last Thursday. "If the conference is held and fails it will be worthless."

MENA III will be a high-profile occasion designed to showcase Egypt's economic progress, and open up business opportunities for both Egyptian and other regional businessmen. But high expectations for the event could be dashed if Israel refuses to budge on the Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese tracks of the peace process. Egypt is worried that if Israel does not prove its good will, enthusiasm for the summit will diminish, and in turn result in failure for regional economic cooperation. "What is the point of a summit where participants do not converse, or where the climate is not suitable for businessmen to achieve good results for the whole region?" Mubarak asked. "The most important thing for us is for the summit to succeed."

Admitting that the current situation in the region is not "favourable", Mubarak said that he "preferred not to postpone the conference so that no one will take advantage of the delay." Arab leaders fear that the region will plunge back into a cycle of violence similar to that preceding the peace process, with the possibility of a new Palestinian *intifada* breaking out. Arab leaders say Israel will bear full responsibility for this, unless it implements signed agreements with the Palestinians and shows more flexibility with the Syrians.

Mubarak, however, remains optimistic, saying in an interview with the London-based *Al-Hayat* newspaper published yesterday that "maybe Israel will make a

move in the next few days."

The US also frowned on Egypt's initial ultimatum. However, Mubarak rejected suggestions that he had changed his mind and decided to go ahead with the summit as a result of US and Israeli pressure. "The US says it wants the conference, but it understands our position," Mubarak said.

US Middle East coordinator Dennis Ross arrived in Cairo on Tuesday for talks with Mubarak and Moussa to find ways of reviving the peace process and the economic summit. "Ross will carry with him certain ideas and we hope he will come with a clear vision concerning all the tracks, including the Palestinian track," said Osama El-Baz, Mubarak's top political adviser. "We cannot concentrate on only one track, because the peace process is a closed circle." Again, El-Baz stressed that it was up to Israel to take "positive and concrete steps over the next few weeks to reactivate the peace process which [it] has plunged into a serious crisis."

Ross will travel to Gaza and Israel during his tour of the region, but is not expected to go to Syria.

Moussa told reporters on Sunday that progress in the process will only be made in proportion to "progress made by Israel". Moussa warned that if Israel does not alter its position "the peace process will collapse. It is like a plant, you have to water and care for it, but if you neglect or harm it, it is finished."

## A night at King Tut's

A failed attempt to steal priceless items from the Tutankhamun collection has exposed the outdated nature of the security system at the Egyptian Museum. Nevine El-Aref reports

A thief who spent the night at the Egyptian Museum in Tahrir Square last week, and nearly got away with 24 priceless items from the Tutankhamun collection when he left the following morning, has highlighted the museum's security problems. Amr Sabri, 25, who was apprehended just before walking out of the museum with artefacts including a solid gold dagger, later told the press that it "was easier to rob the museum than a jewellery shop or a house".

Sabri's near success exposed the primitive nature of security at the museum. Culture Minister Farouk Hosni immediately ordered the allocation of LE25 million for the installation of an electronic security system.

Sabri, who is unemployed, entered the museum on 10 September and concealed himself under one of the display cases on the second floor shortly before the museum closed to visitors at 4pm. After staff and visitors left, he emerged from his hiding place and headed towards the jewellery room of the boy-king Tutankhamun which he entered by climbing over an iron gate that separates it from the rest of the museum.

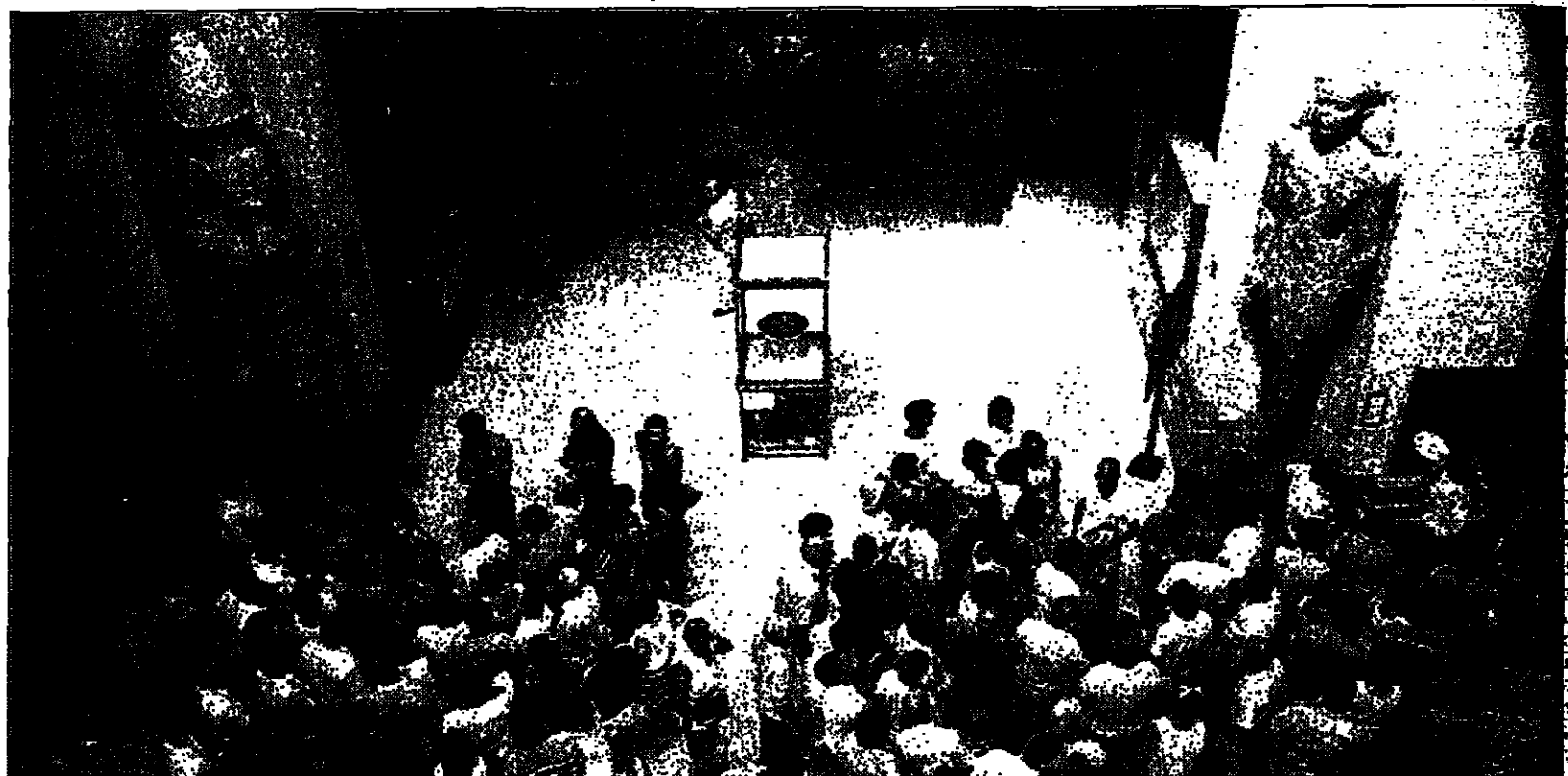
Using a screwdriver which he had bought for LE1, Sabri opened three show cases and collected some priceless items, including the solid gold dagger, necklaces, bracelets and scarabs.

Sabri concealed the dagger in his socks and stashed the other items inside one of the museum's restrooms with the intention of coming back to collect them later.

The theft was discovered the following morning, just before the museum reopened to visitors. Sabri was searched as he roamed around the museum's corridors by a policeman who found nothing on him. A second search, just before he walked out of the museum, yielded the gold dagger and Sabri was arrested.

In statements to the Arabic-language press he explained why it was easier to rob the museum than a private house: "Inside the museum, nobody asks you where you are going or what you are doing...but it would be hard to walk around a house without waking up its inhabitants." His failure, he added, was down to bad luck and the "curse of the pharaohs".

This is said to be the third attempt at robbing the Egyptian Museum, the first having taken place in



Tourists crowd the halls of the Egyptian Museum

photo: Al-Ahram

1987 and the second in 1991.

"How can someone spend the night inside King Tut's room, which is supposed to be guarded by policemen around the clock?" asked Mahmoud Maher Taha, director of the Antiquities Registration Centre. The iron gate separating the room from the rest of the museum, is shut down before the museum closes to visitors and an inventory is taken of the room's contents, he said. "It is unbelievable that someone could enter this room and then leave in the morning, undetected," he said.

Ibrahim El-Nawawi, an Egyptologist, said the theft exposed the "existence of serious loopholes,

and gross negligence, in the security system at the museum." Had the security precautions been seriously enforced, Sabri would have been arrested once the museum closed to visitors, El-Nawawi said.

Experts described the gold dagger as a very rare antiquity that could fetch millions of dollars on the international market. Egyptologist Ahmed El-Sawi raised the possibility that Sabri might have acted on behalf of others, but this was denied by Sabri.

Reports in the Arabic-language press said an electronic security system was to be installed at the museum several years ago, but its installation was de-

layed by lack of funds and government red tape. Alarmed by the attempted robbery, minister Hosni ordered the allocation of LE25 million for the immediate installation of equipment.

According to Ahmed Nawar, head of the Museums Department at the Supreme Council of Antiquities, the new system will include electronic gates, closed-circuit television, an early warning system and burglar alarms. Infra-red equipment will make it possible to keep a close watch on all movements inside the museum around the clock. Police dogs will search the museum's halls and corridors before opening, and after closing time.

## Private degrees questionable

The chairman of the Doctors Syndicate has placed another hurdle in the way of four private universities, even before they open their doors for their first academic year. Shaden Shehab reports on the birth of the controversial institutes

Students enrolling at the four new private universities due to open this autumn may be considered lucky. After all, they can afford the hefty fees — as much as LE25,000 a year for some faculties. But they may find their degrees are of little value if they are not recognised as equivalent to those awarded by state universities.

The Supreme Universities Council has deferred a decision on whether to grant equivalency to private university degrees. A decision will not be taken until the first batch of students graduate from the four private universities four years from now.

Another blow came from an unexpected quarter. Hamdi El-Sayed, chairman of the Doctors Syndicate, warned that medical graduates of the private universities will not be allowed to join the union and, consequently, will not be allowed to practise medicine.

Education Minister Hussein Kamel Bahaddin told *Al-Ahram* Weekly that "the syndicate has its own conditions and regulations. The ministry does not interfere in the union's business and cannot force it to accept private university graduates as members."

The Ministry of Education only has the responsibility of granting equivalency to degrees conferred by the private universities with those obtained at state universities, and this will be done as soon as the first batch of students graduate. "However, Bahaddin warned that equivalency would not be granted if the curricula taught by a private faculty proved to be below standard."

A committee of the Supreme Universities Council will study the hours and courses which the graduates attended. "We have to wait until the students graduate to see what they actually studied throughout their course, because the council cannot base its judgement on intentions," Bahaddin said.

He added that he would be meeting the heads of the four private universities soon to review "their curricula and their facilities, to determine whether they have the necessary laboratories and hospitals." He will later submit a report to Prime Minister Kamal El-Ghazouli who will "take the necessary action".

Hamdi El-Sayed, told the *Weekly* that "we have to be fair to the students. It is better to tell them now that they will not become members of the syndicate, rather than shock them after they graduate. It is enough that they are enrolling in the university without

knowing whether their degree will be recognised or not."

If the degrees were recognised by the Supreme Universities Council, El-Sayed said, then the medical graduates might be allowed to join the syndicate. "But I do not think they will be recognised because the universities do not have the necessary laboratories and hospitals. How can they be recognised as doctors if they have not had the necessary training?"

However, not all syndicates are taking the same line. Hasaballah El-Kafrawi, head of the Engineers Syndicate said it was too early to take a decision. "Why should we shock the students and tell them that we will not allow them to join the syndicates before we determine what the private universities are offering?" he asked.

Medical students, El-Kafrawi argued, get their hospital training in their final university years and "so they do not need hospitals for this academic year. We have to give the private universities the chance to finish their construction work rather than judge them now." After all, he argued, the education offered by the private universities might prove better than that at state universities.

El-Kafrawi suggested that syndicates should specify the courses as well as the credit hours a student must take as a precondition of syndicate membership.

Dr Samir Badawi, president of the Sixth of October University which has a Faculty of Medicine and a Faculty of Pharmacy, said that "to make sure that the Supreme Universities Council will grant equivalent status for private and state university degrees, and to ensure that syndicates will accept our graduates as members, I invited the syndicates and professors at the state universities to put forward the required specifications and preconditions. We will abide by whatever they say," he promised. Badawi said his invitation was turned down by Hamdi El-Sayed.

Declaring that the Sixth of October University was well-equipped, Badawi said the university would take over, and upgrade, a local hospital carrying the same name. "Dr El-Sayed should come and see the standard of our university, then he might change his mind," he added.

According to Badawi, 91 students have applied for the Faculty of Medicine and 346 for the Faculty of Pharmacy. "But 300 is our ceiling," he said. Tuition fees are LE25,000 a year.

In addition to Sixth of October, three other private universities are opening this academic year: Misr International University, the University of Modern Sciences and the University of Science and Technology.

All four have come under fire for charging high tuition fees, thus excluding all but students from very wealthy families.

## Younger Nasserists break with DNP

Dissension within Daoud's Democratic Nasserist Party may lead to the birth of a new political group, spearheaded by a younger generation of Nasserists

A group of younger Nasserists, disenchanted by what they view as old guard policies, are considering the establishment of a new political group, aimed at projecting a vision of Nasserist ideology that is viable in the modern world, reports Hazem Kandil.

The split from the official Democratic Nasserist Party, under the leadership of Daoud, is led by Amin Eskandar and Hamid Sabahi, two party figures whose membership was frozen nearly a year ago.

Eskandar, who is currently working on the new group's platform, said that the new vision would "address new horizons and yet remain possible to implement." While retaining traditional Nasserist slogans, new methods of action would be evolved to convince the public that "Nasserism can be turned into a reality."

Eskandar was optimistic that the new party would get the green light from the Political Parties Committee — a semi-governmental body whose approval is required to obtain a licence as a legal political party. "Although the committee's approval is a major obstacle, I am sure our programme will be sufficiently unique to be accepted," he said. Under the Political Parties Law, to win legality, a new party must have a platform that is different from the programmes of already existing groups.

Sabahi did not share Eskandar's optimism, believing that the chances of the 'new' Nasserists gaining official status were slim. "There are many obstacles, especially the Political Parties Committee," he said. However, he maintained that the breakthrough group's most important task was to launch a general movement throughout the country "to revive the lost sense of belonging in the souls of Egyptians."

According to Eskandar, the split which led him, Sabahi and two other leading Nasserists to walk out of the party was not caused by a power struggle, but was based on a "conflict of generations". Terming Daoud and his followers the "traditional school", Eskandar said the new party would be led by a new generation "with a different political consciousness."

"It was our generation that battled to keep the Nasserist dream alive while the old guard were locked up in prison," he continued, criticising the older generation for having "no vision, no dreams, no imagination."

Meanwhile, Daoud denied that his party's ranks were marred by divisions. "If anyone sees otherwise, that is his problem," he said. Ahmed Hassan, the party's secretary-general, also denied that conflicts existed within the party. He conceded, however, that "differences of opinion are only natural."

Asked about the suspension of Eskandar, Sabahi and the two others, Hassan said they had been "punished" for committing what he described as an "organisational error". They had, he said, illegally headed the annual meeting of the party's central committee and "attempted to impose decisions that would have caused confusion among party members."

Daoud concurred that the suspension was simply a "matter of error and punishment." Eskandar maintained that the new group and Daoud's party shared the same ideology — the difference would be in emphasis. He said the new party's platform would focus on upgrading education and scientific research, launching giant agricultural and industrial projects, technological advancement, restructuring the public sector and "shifting its ownership to the people", and the full realisation of democracy.

Sabahi agreed with this analysis, but showed greater interest in Gamal Abdel-Nasser's three circles of Egyptian patriotism: Arab nationalism and Islamic culture. Sabahi is seeking a link between the three circles which would be simple enough for the average citizen to understand. "Finding that link interpreting its significance and imbuing it in the consciousness of every citizen is my first concern," he said.

Daoud, meanwhile, said that all Nasserists should be grouped within the same party. However, he maintained that he would welcome the birth of a new Nasserist party "as long as it remains committed to the genuine principles of Nasserism."

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## Freedom of expression and public service

Awad El-Morr,

Chief Justice of the Supreme Constitutional Court, examines rulings emphasising the right to criticise public servants



In case No 37 for the 11th judicial year, decided on the 6 February, 1993, the Court was confronted with a constitutional issue relating to the freedom of expression as applied in respect of criticism of public servants.

Under paragraph two of Article 302 of the penal code criticising in a defaming manner whoever performs the duties or assumes the responsibilities of a public servant is deemed to be within the bounds of law, with the provision that the critic has to establish the truth of all allegations. The onus of proof incumbent on him under this paragraph is further detailed in paragraph two of Article 123 of the law on criminal procedure which stipulates that whoever is accused of the crime of libel — by way of press or by any other publication — has to present before the respective investigator at his first interrogation, and at most within the following five days, a statement indicating the evidence, testifying every fact he ascribes either to a person charged with the duties of public office or service or having a public representative assignment, otherwise the production of that evidence shall be inadmissible.

The constitutional issue in question centered on the five days time-limit within which the accused has to produce the statement indicating the evidence he had confirming the veracity of his allegations.

In striking down the challenged time-limit the Court noted that originally libel is a crime entailing disgrace or causing contempt to a particular individual. However, under the penal law, libel is not a crime when the slanderous facts attributed to those undertaking public responsibilities of whatever nature are proven. The idea behind decriminalisation in such cases is that the efficient performance of public services invites the concern of the people as a whole, and that within that interest the negative aspects of that performance should be overtly displayed by every citizen in order to avoid mismanagement and improper behaviour.

In addition, the Court explained, public services involve duties which public servants are bound to achieve, and not prerogatives to benefit therefrom. The framers of the Constitution were keen to limit activities of both the legislative and executive branches, with a view to enabling the effective exercise of rights and freedoms embodied therein. Development of such rights and freedoms together with the exertion of constant efforts for their advancement marked, in the eyes of the Court, their vitality and recognisable social value. Within that context divulging opinions in connection with public services mirrors a principle of constitutional value considered a prerequisite for assessing the manner of their exercise. Evidently, the methods controlling the functioning of such services may adversely affect the rational ambitions of any given community.

The Court maintained, therefore, that criticising public servants along with expanding and circulating ideas in whatever form are liberties to be granted in principle without being impeded or subjected to prior restraints regarding their publication. Concomitant to any democratic regime, the Court affirmed, is the preservation of these liberties which are instrumental in guaranteeing the flow of information from whatever source and irrespective of boundaries in a market-place open to all. Unless opinions are categorically and freely expounded, irrespective of their falsity or rightfulness and regardless of their collision with or awareness of public interest, the path for truth shall grow cloudy and become gloomy.

There is no point in claiming that disclosing and evaluating imperfections or deficiencies in public services injures a legitimate interest, the Court remarked. Nor shall law be administered to conceal malpractice therein. What characterises the constitutional document is that the electorate impose their government to serve their own interests. Deviations in the performance of public duties, whether effected recklessly or intentionally, should call upon citizens for their correction in pursuance of their rights directly linked with the effective exercise of the democratic regime within which the government is held accountable before the people and considered obedient to constitutional limitations, the Court added.

Careful consideration of public issues, the Court went on, serves no end but to draw attentive discussion to their different dimensions. Deliberations conducted liberally in this area are a vehicle for overtly transmitting ideas, views and conceptions, notwithstanding their being in favour of or against public authorities, in order to peacefully achieve a required and thoughtful change advancing reform or progress.

Indeed, opinions freely expressed and conclusively exhibited, will end in positive results, and in no way would reflect selective choices arbitrarily or forcibly made by public authorities. Public order is not solely maintained by the deterrent nature of punishment. The road to national safety lies in equal opportunities designed to facilitate the free trade in ideas and to redress different aspects of public grievances with adequate remedies dictated by the public will.

Therefore, the Court stated, alignment of constitutional provisions with the concept of a market-place of ideas in all matters of public concern, is a must. In no domain may law impose silence on others. Enforced discussion would result in the denial of the power of mind, restrain intellectual liberty along with imagination and aspirations, and ultimately breed fear joined with coercion and constraint endangering the stability of the nation. Consequently, the constitutional protection of the freedom of expression shall extend to even acrimonious criticism of public servants without invading its core or disregarding its goals.

Viewing as presumably false or coloured with bad faith every fact that would disrepute a public servant is flagrantly misleading. Declared opinions damaging to the image of particular public servants should not be evaluated apart from the exigencies of the weighty public interest which requires disclosure of all relevant information that might reveal incompetence in conducting the business entrusted to public servants.

Under Article 47 of the Constitution, the Court affirmed, freedom of expression is granted in all domains — political, economic and social. However, two aspects of this freedom are expressly mentioned therein, namely, the right of self-criticism and that of constructive criticism, both envisaged as being paramount for the safety of the national structure. Freedom of expression is the derivative source of both rights perceived — especially in the political field — as a mechanism for a viable control through the system of checks and balances exacting the strict observance of a disciplined conduct in public services.

Also associated with criticism, the Court observed, is the right of every citizen to have access to and be informed of all materials relevant to the proper performance of such services. The constructive nature of criticism, enshrined in the Constitution, was never envisaged as entitling the executive to exclude opinions incompatible with its views in defiance of the right to freely discuss public affairs, granted equally to all citizens. Due account has to be given to the fact that survival of the freedom of expression depends on securing adequate breathing space, and that the required constitutional protection for its core must not be shaken or waived, even upon a finding that the challenged opinions have gone beyond their rational limits. People normally and substantially differ as to what is extravagant or moderate and also as to a clear-cut criterion demarcating what is right and wrong. Ideas are mostly advocated with excess.

Therefore, the Court proclaimed, a phrase in a publication should neither be critically reviewed apart from its context, nor scrutinised under rigid standards. The same applies to the critical estimate of public services which must be honoured and in no way sacrificed or compromised to avoid slanderous statements against public servants. Enlarging the area of defamation to protect public servants against disgrace will narrow down that area of open discussion, the Court confirmed.

The right to conduct analyses regarding the manner of the disposition of public services derives from the popular control generated by diligent and active citizens. Rendering that control operative or burdensome will bring to an end or largely weaken the critical approach to public affairs. No hindrance that would frustrate a fruitful open discussion could be more drastic than penal restraints unduly obstructing evidence necessary for the negation of libel in the respective publication. Considering inadmissible by the force of law evidence submitted in the absence of the evidentiary statement against libel prescribed by the challenged provision will defeat all efforts attentive to the valueless aspects of public performance. In all events, the critic will be put in jeopardy and stand trial for slander in spite of the veracity of meritless and tainted governmental behaviour.

In their biggest war games ever, Badr-96, Egyptian forces, with all their arms, fought on all fronts, concluding with a major battle in Sinai. Galal Nassar describes the exercises and explores their possible political significance

# Ending with a Sinai battle

## War games on all fronts

After ground and air "battles" raged for days in the nation's south and north-west, the Badr-96 war games ended with an offensive across the Suez Canal and armoured battles in the Sinai desert. In the third and final stage of the 10-day exercise, "described as the largest since the 1973 War, 'friendly' and 'hostile' troops used chemical weapons of mass destruction as they fought for control of a desert valley. Paratroopers were dropped and forces landed along Sinai's Mediterranean coast.

Taking part in the final stage were troops of the Second and Third Armies, with an armoured division from the Central Military Zone (which encompasses Cairo and its surrounding areas). The forces were divided into two warring sides, and the terrain was also equally divided between them, with each side getting a fair share of mountains, mountain passes, open spaces and water barriers.

The action across the Suez Canal began on Tuesday night after troops, positioned on the western bank, received orders to storm across the waterway to repulse an offensive along the eastern bank. In darkness, troops used pontoon bridges and floating craft to reach the eastern side. The crossing troops had the support of artillery which pounded 'hostile' positions in the Sinai desert but came under fierce attacks from 'enemy' warplanes that blasted their bridges and craft out of the canal's waters.

The crossing was followed last night by a simulated battle, involving paratroopers, saiga (thunderbolt) commando forces, armour and mechanised infantry, in the area of Al-Mohamediyat and along the Roumme-Balouza coastline. The two warring sides, fighting for control of a desert valley, used chemical weapons to obstruct the advance of their opponents. The 'hostile' troops then threw F-16 jet fighters and Alphajet support aircraft into the fray and the 'friendly' side counter-attacked with anti-aircraft Apache helicopters and artillery fire.

The 'hostile' was watched by Defence Minister Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Magdi Hatata and 35 foreign military attaches based in Cairo.

The final stage of the war-games also featured a mock air attack by a large number of warplanes against the area of Gabal El-Goza near Abu Suhan. The attacking aircraft were picked up by the radar of the 8th Air Defence Division, which is equipped with a state-of-the-art mechanised command and control system. Information about the course 'taken by the attackers and their positions was passed on to jet interceptors as well as anti-aircraft missile sites which engaged the raiding warplanes, with a high rate of hits.

In the final stage of the exercise, the navy landed troops along the Roumme-Balouza coastline of the Sinai Desert, while the air force provided protection. Saiga and mechanised infantry units were also dropped from the air. Similar landings took place in the Western Desert and along the Mediterranean coast. This phase began with an air strike by 'friendly' forces to thwart preparations for an attack by 'hostile' troops seeking to capture vital coastline positions. The strike was followed by a major landing from the sea and air to completely finish off the 'hostile' offensive in the areas of Al-Omayed and Al-Bahia.

Maj. Gen. Anwar Hussein Ahmed, commander of the Northern Military Zone, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the main thrust of the second phase was the "strategic deployment" of troops and their readiness to deliver a pre-emptive strike to foil enemy preparations for an offensive.

The sea landing along the Al-Omayed coast was staged by three ships which transported troops and amphibious craft from Alexandria. They were guarded by destroyers, missile boats, a sub-chaser and minesweepers, but came under attack from the air as they sailed toward Al-Omayed and from frogmen as they approached the coastline. They also came under fire from coastal artillery. The ships returned fire.

The paratroopers were dropped behind en-



photos: Toni Fares, Nour Sobhi and Magdi Hanna

emy lines in the area of Khashm Al-Esh with the aim of securing the sea landing by destroying 'hostile' radars and advance units and then linking up with the forces that landed from the sea. This was followed by the high point of the second phase, an armoured battle in the area of Alam Halfa. The landings and the simulated fighting were watched by Lt. Gen. Hatata from a helicopter.

Tantawi, who watched the armoured battle, insisted that the two warring sides should act under the assumption that weapons of mass destruction had been used. "As long as the other party along our border is in possession of advanced weapons, we should take protective measures, either negative measures to reduce the consequences of using these weapons or positive measures," Tantawi said.

The area of Alam Alfa was the scene of a major confrontation in 1942 between German forces advancing on Egypt and defending British 8th Army troops.

Badr-96 began last week in an area near Egypt's southern border with 'friendly' land and air forces repulsing a three-pronged 'hostile' offensive that targeted the Red Sea coast, the Nile Valley and the oases of the Western Desert.

The attacking forces established a beachhead across the border after blasting the 'friendly' defences with warplanes and artillery. Troops, armour and Chapparral air defence units were rushed to the 'friendly' side from Port Suez aboard a passenger ship and two K-106 landing craft. Additional troops were ferried by C-130 transports, Nile steamers, trains and trucks.

The 'friendly' forces managed to encircle the beachhead, forcing the 'hostile' troops to withdraw southwards, and then went on the of-

fensive to "punish the aggressive state". Artillery was brought in and paratroopers were dropped to finish off the retreating forces.

Rear Admiral Ibrahim Yousef, commander of the Red Sea Naval Base, said that a simulated naval and air battle broke out as the troops were being transported by ship from Port Suez to Safage. The 'hostile' side sent a submarine, missile boats and warplanes to attack the transport ships, as they sailed toward Safage, but they were repulsed, he said.

Maj. Gen. Ahmed Sultan, chief of the Armed Forces Training Department, expressed satisfaction with the way the troops were transported by sea for a record distance of 350km.

Maj. Gen. Samir Yousef, commander of the border guards, said his forces played a leading role in repulsing the 'hostile' offensive and then launching the 'counter-offensive'. The border guards, he said, have been supplied with tanks, artillery pieces and air defence missiles "and are not simply early warning forces now but confrontation forces."

Taking part in Badr-96 were F-16, Mirage 2000, Phantom F-4, MiG 21 and Alphajet warplanes, MI-8, Apache, Gazelle and Buffalo helicopters, C-130 transports and EC2 early warning aircraft. Anti-aircraft Chapparral, Crotale, SAM and Hawkley missiles were used along with TOW anti-tank and El-Fateh anti-mine missiles. Also participating were American M1-A1 and M-60 tanks, M-113 armoured personnel carriers and Soviet T-54 and T-55 tanks. The navy contributed submarines, minesweepers, destroyers, frigates, missile boats and landing and supply craft.

Edited by Wadie Kirolos

## Any messages?

Defence Minister Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi has repeatedly issued assurances that Badr-96, the country's largest-ever war games, have no political objectives. Describing the event as part of an overall plan for armed forces training, he has stressed that the games were not intended as a message to any of Egypt's neighbours.

But, according to analysts, the enormous scale of the manoeuvres, with the accompanying obvious muscle-flexing, have undoubtedly conveyed a political message, albeit one which might not have been intended when the blueprint of the exercise was drawn up some time ago.

Staging the war games in various directions along all Egypt's borders shows the armed forces had reached "the peak of combat efficiency, indicating an unprecedented degree of military preparedness," said strategy expert Maj. Gen. Kamal Shediid.

Shediid said the exercise reflected "Egypt's strength as a major power that is not prepared to have its national security threatened or questioned." This is why the armed forces train each year as if it were the last year, or even the last month, before the outbreak of war.

Such a major exercise, Shediid added, "conveyed a clear message of deterrence, the maximum possible political and military deterrence. The use of the armed forces in these war-games is the political use of the optimum force."

The exercise, he said, must have "aroused the concern of others, whether neighbours or brothers. Accordingly, some of them may take precautionary measures in preparation for any contingency. This is only natural and should be expected. We too might have done the same if one of our neighbours staged such a large exercise. Militarily, one cannot relax if there are active forces along the border that may go on the offensive."

And yet, by conveying the deterrence message, the exercise would indirectly serve to reduce the prospects of war, Shediid said.

In Israel, the media reported that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's military establishment had been debating the significance of the exercises. "We must follow with caution any movement of forces," Netanyahu said. "We are certainly not sitting back care-free regarding certain possibilities, but we are also making it clear to the other side that our direction is that of peace," he told Israel Radio in an interview last Sunday.

Maj. Gen. Abdel-Rahman Rushdi El-Hawawari, a professor of strategy at the Nasser Military Academy, agreed that the games demonstrated a "capability to secure our land" in all directions.

The war games, he added, "reflected a true picture of the threats that may confront the armed forces in the near or distant future." They also served to show that reservists could be quickly mobilised and that military morale was high, he said.

The principal objective of the exercise, analysts believe, was to provide the armed forces with training in "strategic deployment" or the movement of troops by land, sea and air from their bases to the battle fronts. Badr-96 was the largest transport operation in the history of the armed forces. Armour was moved by trailers for hundreds of kilometres to the northwest of the country. The Nile was used for the first time to transport heavy equipment and civilian ferries and ships were enlisted to transport men and equipment in the Red and Mediterranean seas. Egypt proved its ability as strategic deployment prior to the 1991 Gulf War, when it transported 40,000 troops along with armour and equipment to the Gulf.

Badr-96 also provided an opportunity to test new weapons and equipment, such as the American M1-A1 battle tank, anti-aircraft missiles, a new mechanised command and control system, as well as new frigates, submarines and minesweepers.

In addition to testing the speed with which reservists could go into action, Badr-96 affirmed the ability of commanders to run battles simultaneously along three different fronts. Moreover, a significant part of the exercise, averaging around 50 per cent, and mainly involving the use of live ammunition, was staged at night. This reflected the belief that future wars are likely to be held in darkness because of the proliferation of infra-red (night-time vision) equipment.

Tantawi said that the deployment of forces along the country's borders had not compromised the armed forces' permanent defensive positions because some forces had not taken part in the exercise and had remained in their original positions. "There is also a plan for the rapid return of the forces participating in the exercise in case of a surprise attack while the exercise is under way," he added.

Tantawi said that most modern wars take place in desert terrain; city wars are a remote possibility. However, he stressed that Egypt had forces well-trained in urban warfare.

More important, the exercise provided the forces with training in how to respond to the enemy's use of weapons of mass destruction, be they chemical, biological or nuclear.



# 'Iraq's legitimate right'

With the US continuing its military build-up in the Arab Gulf region, Iraq's Foreign Minister Mohamed Said Al-Sahaf, in an exclusive interview (below right), told **Khaled Dawoud** his country was attacked because it foiled a CIA plot to overthrow Saddam Hussein

The United States has this week been flying more than 2,000 former "employees" in northern Iraq from Turkey to the Pacific island of Guam, before moving them on to America. Some of those airlifted to Guam are reported to have been engaged in a secret \$20 million operation to topple Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) officials revealed recently.

"This is one of the greatest setbacks US intelligence has ever suffered," a senior US official told the *Los Angeles Times*. The handful of CIA officers overseeing the covert operation in northern Iraq reportedly fled as soon as Iraqi troops helped Massoud Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) capture the city of Arbil. They left behind a fragmented cadre of agents, among them Iraqi military defectors and Kurdish rebels. It was reported that many of those were killed by Iraqi intelligence agents who entered the Kurdish areas with the KDP.

According to US reports, President Bill Clinton expanded the covert operation in January, signing a secret order directing the CIA to provide weapons, organise military training and install intelligence-gathering equipment for two opposition groups, the Iraqi National Accord (INA), a Jordan-based group that comprised defecting elements from Saddam Hussein's special security forces and members of the military, and the Iraqi National Congress (INC), based in Arbil. When Saddam's forces entered Arbil the whole episode of a rescue operation for around 200 INC members trapped in northern Iraq became the focus of international news reports.

Given the continuing US military build-up in the Gulf region, and the story of the fate of the CIA-backed dissidents in the news, and it was only natural that Iraqi Foreign Minister Al-Sahaf would be the centre of attraction for most of the international media when he attended the two-day Arab League meeting which concluded in Cairo on Sunday.

Al-Sahaf did not take part in the foreign ministers' meeting held at the Egyptian Foreign Ministry on the fringe of the Arab League session — the invitation was limited to those countries that attended Cairo's June Arab Summit. But his presence was clearly felt through several statements in which he expressed

Iraq's willingness to "open a new page" in relations with Arab countries.

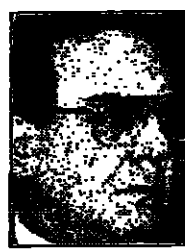
The first gesture by Al-Sahaf was a handshake with a traditional foe, Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq Al-Shara, shortly before the opening of the league's meeting. The Iraqi foreign minister also held a separate meeting with his Egyptian counterpart, Amr Moussa, in which he praised highly President Hosni Mubarak's opposition to Turkish plans to establish a so-called security zone inside Iraqi territory. Turkey allegedly wants to prevent Kurdish rebels from infiltrating across its border with Iraq.

Al-Sahaf said his country was hoping to develop relations with Egypt, "and to follow up economic and trade cooperation which we have already started in a way which would not contradict [United Nations] Security Council resolutions."

Meanwhile, Iraqi diplomats, headed by their ambassador to the Arab League, Nabil Nejm, were actively conferring with Arab officials, trying to explain the Iraqi view on the reasons behind the latest military confrontation with the US.

According to one senior member of the Iraqi delegation who spoke to *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Saddam "has chosen the right time" to attempt to restore his government's control over the volatile northern Kurdish region.

"Had this attempt been made at any time other than that of the US elections, we would have seen the American army's ground troops in northern Iraq. Clinton can opt for striking missiles at targets inside Iraq, but losing one or two soldiers on the ground could make him lose the whole elections," the diplomat, who requested anonymity, said. "We were expecting the Americans to strike, of course, but we also knew that the strike would be limited." Most experts on Iraq believe that Saddam's latest move in northern Iraq was a continuation of his policy of testing the strength of the international alliance against his country every now and then in an attempt to end the six-year-old UN sanctions imposed on Baghdad. Following the US strike, the alliance seems to be at its lowest ebb, with the US failing to engineer a UN Security Council resolution condemning Iraq for moving its troops to the north.



Al-Sahaf

The whole world is watching the situation in Iraq closely. Do you expect that, as the crisis escalates, another US military strike against your country is imminent?

We have done nothing to cause any kind of escalation. It is purely an American "escalation" against Iraq, and it is not the first time that the Americans have tried to create a false pretext in order to implement their aggressive policies in the region and in particular against Iraq. It is not a matter of predicting. We have to look at facts, and all facts indicate clearly that the American policy is heading towards more tensions, more "escalation" against Iraq, with no real justification but to serve their interests — which can be summed up as imposing hegemony on the region through confrontation with Iraq. They mean to humiliate and impose hegemony on the Gulf states in order to be in full control of oil resources and the pretext, the false cover, is that they are confronting Iraq. We hope our brothers in the Gulf understand that and are wary of America's policies.

But do you believe that the Iraqi promise not to fire missiles on US planes in the two no-fly zones would persuade the Americans to forgo a new strike against your country?

We did not give any promise. We said we suspend retaliation and we suspend exercising our legitimate right of self-defence against the American aggression on Iraq — as requested by the Russian leadership and other countries — in order to give political efforts time to persuade the Americans to stop their aggression against Iraq. We want to try to find a political solution and scrap the two illegitimate no-fly zones imposed on Iraq by three governments. Those no-fly zones are not in accordance with any of the Security Council resolutions. It is an act of aggression. So we are giving political efforts the time and opportunity to persuade those three governments — the American government, the British government and the French government — to stop their ag-

gression against Iraq by imposing the two no-fly zones.

The US said that it was not enough for Iraq to stop firing at US planes and that Baghdad should also remove its mobile missiles from southern Iraq so they do not pose a threat to US pilots. Are you going to respond to this second demand?

It is our legitimate right to move inside our country, and we do not accept that anybody or any country tell us what we should or should not do inside our country. They should stop provoking Iraq.

The two no-fly zones were imposed nearly five years ago. Why did the Iraqi government decide to move against them only now?

It is not only now. We have been striking at American planes since 1991, and you remember very well that in 1993, before former US President George Bush lost the elections, there was fighting for more than 23 days. So, from the very beginning, we rejected, we opposed, and we did and will do whatever we can in order to defend our country against the American aggression.

Several political commentators accused Saddam of offering Clinton an opportunity to boost his chances in the coming election by provoking Washington to take military action against Iraq. What is your comment on that?

Should we remind you chronologically of what happened? Your question contradicts facts. There was a plot against Iraq in the north. One Kurdish faction requested the help of the Iraqi government — its government, because they are Iraqis in the north, first and foremost. We helped Mr Barzani. But the Americans, because the plot was an American plot against Iraq and now it is in the news, were forced to admit their actions. To avenge what the Iraqi Kurds or Arabs had done to foil the American plot, they provoked us and they struck at us in the south. So, they started it and your question is not fair. We defended our country against the most evil country in the world, the United States of America. It is our legitimate right and we will continue to exercise it.

## Kuwait covered

NEARLY 3,000 US troops will start arriving in Kuwait today for joint military exercises with the Gulf state. Anti-missile Patriot missiles have already been deployed in the country to defend against any possible Saudi attack from Iraq. US military officials said yesterday.

Kuwait received eight F-117 Stealth bombers and 18 F-16 fighters this week, and 1,200 US soldiers are already there taking part in joint exercises near the Iraq border — part of a US military build-up in the Gulf designed to counter any threat from Iraq.

Britain, meanwhile, announced yesterday it was still ready to send troops to Kuwait if the Kuwaiti government demanded. British Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind said after talks with his Kuwaiti counterpart, Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah, in London: "We have shown in the past a willingness for troops to be sent, and if it became necessary in the future we would also respond in a positive way."

On Tuesday, France took what was considered a step towards supporting the US moves against Saddam Hussein, as AP reported that the French were willing to allow American planes to fly over French territory.

## Barzani meetings

MASSOUD Barzani, the head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) met yesterday with Robert Pelletreau, the US assistant secretary of state for Near East affairs, in Ankara to explain his new alliance with Iraq. He also met with Turkish Foreign Minister Tansu Ciller.

KDP officials said Barzani aimed to clear the confusion over the situation in northern Iraq and prevent the West from abandoning the Kurdish safe-haven set up after the 1991 Gulf War.

Barzani's talks with Ciller focused on Turkish security interests and plans to set up a security zone in northern Iraq to keep out Turkish Kurds.

In another development, four Kurdish refugees were killed yesterday and 10 others injured when their camp in northern Iraq was shelled by the Iraqi army and its Kurdish allies, reported IRNA, the Iranian news agency.

## Iraqi radar

IRAQI air defence systems have been tracking with radar US and allied warplanes, but Baghdad has kept its promise not to fire on the planes, said US military sources yesterday.

Iraq said earlier this week it would stop firing on the warplanes patrolling the no-fly zones over northern and southern Iraq. However, they have continued to turn their radar systems on and off, said Lt. Col. Andrew Bourland, spokesman for the Joint Task Force, Southwest Asia.

## Oil for food

WITH IRAQ'S oil-for-food plan on hold, the Iraqi ambassador to the United Nations, Nizar Hamdoun, said yesterday there were no security problems in his country that would prevent the UN from allowing Baghdad to resume oil sales.

US President Bill Clinton said the plan to allow Iraq to begin limited oil sales was suspended because of Saddam Hussein's incursion into northern Iraq. Officially, the decision whether to proceed with the plan rests with UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali.

"I think there is no security problem regarding the personnel or regarding any other activities," Hamdoun told reporters after a half-hour meeting with Boutros Ghali. The Iraqi ambassador refused to say whether the UN secretary-general had offered any indication when sales could resume.

European countries anxious to resume trade with Iraq have urged that the oil-for-food plan be implemented as soon as possible. But Boutros Ghali can only authorise sales after the UN committee overseeing sanctions against Iraq is convinced that Iraq has complied with orders to dismantle its illegal weapons programmes.

Last week, the US blocked the committee's approval of a formula setting the price of Iraqi oil, saying it needed more time to study details.

Washington must also approve a request by France's Banque Nationale de Paris to maintain a US-based account set up to hold profits from the sales. The US, therefore, has considerable leverage in delaying implementation.

## Starving in Iraq

Iraqi people are the victims of political games being played between Washington and Baghdad, **Rasha Saad** reports

It is likely that the oil-for-food deal will prove one of the most serious casualties of Saddam's drive into northern Iraq. UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali announced on 4 September, only a couple of days after Iraqi troops entered Arbil, that he was postponing deployment of personnel needed to implement the oil-for-food plan because of the "deteriorating situation" in northern Iraq. Ghali has given no indication of when he would reconsider deploying the personnel.

President Bill Clinton stated that the Kurdish city Arbil, which was seized by Iraqi troops, was to be a key distribution centre for the humanitarian aid. There are fears that the oil sale will remain on hold at least until after the 5 November US presidential election.

At issue is a 20 May accord between Iraq and the UN (under UN Security Council Resolution 986) that permits Baghdad to sell \$2 billion worth of oil every six months in order to purchase badly needed food, medicine and other goods for its people suffering from six years of sanctions.

About \$260 million was earmarked for Kurdish provinces in the north, not under Baghdad's control, where the UN was to distribute supplies.

The deal was first offered to Iraq several years ago but President Saddam Hussein refused, partly due to the proviso setting aside funds for the Kurds which he claimed violated Iraq's sovereignty.

For the Iraqis, postponement of the implementation of the deal will mean pouring salt on an open wound. Though the agreement was not all they hoped for after the 6-year blockade, it meant getting out of proverbial woods.

According to reports, implementation of the agreement would mean that the Iraqis would get four times as much food and medicine as they were getting prior to the agreement. In the meantime, most people are worried about the soaring prices of food since the new crisis began.

Mohamed Fayek, head of the Arab Organisation for Human Rights, believes that the Iraqi people are not being considered in the formulation of policy toward Baghdad. Fayek argues that the US should have placed more importance on the implementation of the oil-for-food agreement as it will benefit Iraqi children, elderly and women, and not the government.

He described the economic siege imposed on the Iraqis as a flagrant violation



A woman shouts at a pharmacist in Baghdad after learning that there was no medicine to fill her prescription (photo:AP)

of human rights, and the latest attack by the US forces on Iraq as disregarding the rights of both the Iraqis and the Kurdish people.

"The US claim that it is seeking to alleviate the suffering of the Iraqis under Saddam's dictatorship is not true. Now the people are suffering from the sanctions and fears that their country will be divided, as well as the undemocratic actions of their leadership," he said.

Mohamed Abdel-Jabar, spokesman of the Iraqi National Council, the opposition umbrella group operating in Iraqi Kurdistan, believes that the Iraqi regime is responsible for the delay in the implementation of Resolution 986. He alleged that the military operation in Arbil was part of Saddam's plan to block the deal.

"Saddam opposed some of the details of the resolution, including the number of outside observers during the distribution and the bank to which funds would be

transferred," he explained. Abdel-Jabar also claimed that Odaï, Saddam's son, was against the implementation of the agreement as he benefited from the sanctions as they stood. "During the last six years, Odaï was able to establish a large network of companies and control the illegal sale of Iraqi oil to Jordan and Turkey," he said.

Meanwhile the economic situation in Iraq has sharply deteriorated. According to last April's reports, inflation of basic food items reached 5,000 per cent. The price of transportation increased by 50 per cent, the price of children's milk powder tripled, meat cost 3,500 dinars a kilogram and the price of a loaf of bread increased from 20 to 50 dinars.

The average monthly income of an ordinary Iraqi ranges between 3,000 and 4,000 dinars.

Hospitals are experiencing extreme shortages of medicine and equipment, and

education is also suffering. "Schools endure shortages of desks and writing materials. Many pupils have quit their classes to seek jobs, and teachers are also forced to take on more than one job to increase their income," Abdel-Jabar said.

Fayek believes that the latest escalation of difficulties in Iraq, combined with US interference will further increase the suffering of the Iraqi people.

He stated that unlike its 1990 invasion of Kuwait, Iraq did not violate the territorial rights of another country this time and acted within its sovereign borders. Thus the situation did not warrant US intervention.

Fayek added that the US attack on Iraq was an insult to all Arab countries. He claimed that it demonstrated a complete disregard by the US for the opinions of the Arabs. "Why does the US treat Iraq with such cruelty, and not Cuba — which causes more problems for the US Administration? Apparently, the US respects the Latin

American countries more, knowing that they will strongly oppose any harm done to Cuba," he said.

Abdel-Jabar questioned the notion of sovereignty and said that it does not give the regime the right to attack or suppress its people. He also said that Saddam should respect Resolution 688, which demands the Iraqi government halt attacks on its citizens.

Saad Saleh Jabr, head of the opposition group Free Iraqi Council, based in London, agrees with Abdel-Jabar that the Iraqi regime is the primary cause of the suffering of the Iraqi people. However, he also described the US stance on helping the Iraqi people overthrow the regime as "ambiguous".

Jabr calls on the Arab and international communities to offer political and financial aid to the Iraqi people, while at the same time isolating the regime politically and diplomatically until Saddam is overthrown.

## Clinton's 'box' policy

The American policy of boosting its military presence in and around the Gulf is raising many questions. Is the American smokes only meant to contain Iraq or to deter Iraq? A theory making the rounds in Washington is that the Clinton administration's policy towards the Persian Gulf is one of "dual containment", keeping both Iraq and Iran weak, rather than playing one against the other.

The Clinton administration has reserved the right to strike against Iraq. This self-claimed right has been part of the administration's rhetoric, since 3 and 4 September, when the US forces launched 44 cruise missiles at air defence targets in southern Iraq.

Lately, however, the rhetoric has been toned down. President Clinton recently declared, "We have sought no confrontation with President Saddam Hussein. We never did and we don't now."

Clinton's measured rhetoric came as a result of his failure to rally his allies into accepting the bellicose policy of disproportionate strikes, as claimed by US Secretary of Defence William Perry.

Therefore, the Clinton Administration is reconsidering its policy towards the Gulf, while it continues to build up its forces in the area.

"We are not stepping down," said John Shalickashvili, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. "Whether air strikes will be necessary or not will very much depend on Saddam's actions, not his words. Saddam has now indicated that he will not attack our planes unless we attack Iraq," he said.

Additionally, the reconsideration of Clinton's policy towards the Gulf area came as a result of important developments on the domestic scene. Clinton has come under fire from Bob Dole and other Republican opponents for his recent handling of Iraq. The Republicans, who are irked by Clin-

ton's gains in the opinion polls, are accusing Clinton of helping Saddam regain control of northern Iraq and defeat the CIA operations to topple him. Republican strategy aims at putting pressure on Clinton to take a risky gamble in Iraq, and maybe lose.

The military operation by Kurdish forces backed by Baghdad has left the major CIA effort in the Kurdish-controlled region in northern Iraq in tatters.

US efforts to strengthen the anti-Saddam coalition foundered again on Monday, as Kuwait temporarily withheld permission for the US to dispatch two brigades to its territory. The whole issue was a miscalculation on the part of the administration. It announced Clinton's decision to send 5,000 army troops to Kuwait without getting approval of that state. The GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) states, which include Kuwait, found out about the

US decision from CNN.

Kuwait ended up giving its permission for 3,500 US troops to enter its territory after US Defence Secretary William Perry met the Kuwaiti ruler. However, Kuwait made it clear that the US cannot take the Gulf states for granted.

The fact that Kuwait did not give Perry immediate approval was considered a stunning development for Kuwait. Republicans stepped up their attacks on President Clinton and the administration had to apologise to Kuwait, acknowledging that it made a mistake when it announced that it was sending American troops to Kuwait before getting approval from the Kuwaitis.

In a briefing for congressional leaders on Tuesday, Clinton defended his course of action in ordering two cruise missile strikes against Iraq two weeks ago. But voices in the Congress are calling for a long-term strategy on Iraq.

Senator Nunn, senior member in the Armed Services Committee, said, "In the long run, we need to provide the initial defence, perhaps combining with Egypt and Jordan and letting the United States be more of a residual force."

Clinton does not seem alarmed by the gains Iraqi President Saddam Hussein has made in the north, because the US has made strategic gains in the south, where the vital interests of the United States lie. The net result of the recent confrontation is that Iraq has regained control of its land, while the Americans are dominating the sky of Iraq.

The US strikes and related American actions may erode Baghdad's ability to threaten US allies in the Gulf, but some are concerned that a weaker Iraq might retaliate internally. Washington's greatest fear now is that Iraq may respond to the US attacks through terrorism against US forces or facilities in the Middle East.

مكتبة من الأصل



# Hebron under siege

The construction of the latest Israeli bypass road in the West Bank secures the armlock around Hebron's neck, writes **Graham Usher** from the besieged Palestinian city

Burrowing its way through the hills that fall between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, the Gush Etzion bypass road is the latest in a network of 29 roads Israeli governments have built in the West Bank and Gaza in recent years. The building has accelerated since the Oslo Accords were signed in 1993.

Via two tunnels drilled through the hills and a 50-metre-high bridge, the new road — costing \$30 million — enables Israelis to reach the Gush Etzion bloc of 14 Jewish settlements without having to pass through the "Palestinian area" of Bethlehem, in effect making Gush Etzion a suburb of Jerusalem. Palestinians are not allowed to use the road, even though 1,200 dunams (over one square kilometre) of West Bank land was confiscated to build it.

The road ends south of Bethlehem, where another bypass road — road number 60 (570 dunams) — links Gush Etzion to the Kiryat Arba settlement, just east of Hebron and home to around 7,000 settlers. A third "military" road (150 dunams) joins Kiryat Arba to Beit Hargal settlement. Within this triangle is squeezed Hebron, the West Bank's second largest Palestinian city after East Jerusalem and the reef on which the Oslo process is grounded. The bypass roads show why.

Palestinians fear the roads are being built to draw the final map of Palestine in advance of the final status negotiations. "The roads are not there simply to service the settlements," says Palestinian geographer, Khalil Tufaili, "but to stop Palestinian cities like Hebron and Bethlehem from expanding."

A look at the topography of roads and settlements they connect supports this view. West Bank cities like East Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Ramallah are becoming physically segregated from each other thanks to chains of settlements linked by the roads. Hebron is another, crucial link in the chain, largely because of the 400 or so Jewish settlers who live amid the city's 120,000 Palestinians.

Under 1995's interim agreement signed in September, the Israeli army was to have redeployed its forces from 85 per cent of Hebron by April this year. Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres deferred the redeployment to pressure PLO leader Yasser Arafat into cracking down on his Islamist opposition and amending those articles of the Palestinian Covenant which denied Israel's right to exist. When the Likud Party was elected in May, Is-



A Palestinian walks his son through the rubble of their Jerusalem home which was demolished by the Israeli authorities (photo: Reuters)

rael's new Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu re-affirmed that the interim agreement would have to be "rectified to secure peace for the most ancient Jewish community in the world." Following his meeting with Arafat on 4 September, Netanyahu said the PLO leader "understood" this, even though "it was not easy."

Such comments have alarmed Hebron's Palestinians, who are worried about what these "rectifications" might entail. But there are signs. Under the interim agreement, Israel pledged to re-open Hebron's main vegetable market, closed in the aftermath of Baruch Goldstein's killing of 29 Palestinians in the Ibrahim Mosque in February 1994. One year after the agreement was signed the market remains closed.

Last week, Jewish settlers took over two stores near the market, prompting Palestinian fears that the settlers were about to claim the area as theirs. In

response, on 16 September several hundred Palestinians, led by Hebron's mayor, Mustafa Al-Natshe, converged on the market to demand its immediate re-opening. "If Israel won't implement the agreement, we will implement it ourselves," said Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) member for Hebron, Mohamed Hourani.

The Israeli army, backed by armed settlers, closed off the market. Tensions were defused when Israel's military governor for the Hebron area, Colonel Baruch Najjar, agreed to meet Al-Natshe. Najjar said he could not re-open the market since this was a decision for Israel's "political echelon". But he offered a compromise: the army would build a "red line" wall across the market to separate "Jews from Arabs." Al-Natshe rejected the compromise as a "violation" of the interim agreement. The Israeli army says it is in line with the agreement. Palestinians are starting to fear the army may be right.

Last January, a second "security" agreement on Hebron was signed between Israel's Major General Ilan Biran and the Palestinian Authority's (PA) General Abdel-Razzak Al-Yahya. This calls for Israel's redeployment to be amended according to the "redelineation" of the Hebron area as shown on the attached map.

Needless to say, nobody on the Palestinian side — save Al-Yahya, Arafat and perhaps one or two other PA negotiators — has seen the map. But Palestinians in Hebron already have a fair idea of what "redelineation" means. They also suspect Netanyahu is exploiting the January agreement as the basis for his "rectifications".

Since January, the army has confiscated 3.5 square kilometres and demolished several Palestinian homes in the middle of Hebron to lay a "territorial corridor" linking the Jewish enclaves in the city to Kiryat Arba. This may comprise only

15 per cent of Hebron's municipal area but, if built, will remove the Ibrahim Mosque and vegetable market from Palestinian control and effectively split Hebron into a "Palestinian area" and a "Jewish quarter". This is why, say Palestinians, Najjar offered the "compromise" of a wall as a prelude to outright separation. This is also why Al-Natshe refused it. He knows — as does every Palestinian in Hebron — that once the wall is built the settlers will utilise their "quarter" to swell their number.

"The original agreement on Hebron was hard to take," says PLC member Hourani. "But these changes are creating a segregated Jewish ghetto in the heart of the city." He warns of an imminent "explosion" should Israel try to enforce these changes. But he declines to say whether Arafat and the PA negotiators — in their haste to be rid of the snag of Hebron — have laid the fuse for it.

## Jews-only road

MAYOR of Hebron, Mustafa Al-Natshe, said Israeli soldiers prevented him and other Palestinians from using a new road that links Jerusalem to the Jewish settlements located between the Palestinian cities of Bethlehem and Hebron. Natshe told Reuters that he was turned back last week, when he tried driving on the bypass road to Jerusalem. He said that soldiers told him, "Only Jews use this road."

In response, an Israeli army spokeswoman said that "The Palestinian population has available to it acceptable [alternative] roads with passage points, through which Palestinians with permits to enter Israel may pass."

PLO officials say that the construction of bypass roads in the West Bank violates the Israeli-PLO agreements.

## Lebanon gets a unicolour parliament

Government officials consolidated their power. Hizbullah proved its efficacy. But Syria is the main winner in Lebanon's elections, reports **Zeina Khodr** from Beirut

Lebanon's five-week-long parliamentary election has ended. Its results show that there will be no significant opposition in the incoming legislature and that the majority of the newly-elected deputies are supporters of the Syrian-backed government.

The results of the final round of the five-phase poll, held in the Bekaa Governorate on Sunday, showed a landslide victory for the predominantly pro-government National Unity ticket. This ticket included candidates from the two main Shi'ite factions in the country, the Amal movement and Hizbullah, along with ministers, incumbent deputies and traditional political leaders.

A former House Speaker, Hussein Al-Husseini, a candidate on the National Unity ticket, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the coalition was formed with the aim of averting a possible confrontation during voting.

The Syrian-backed list of the National Unity ticket did not face any real challenge. Twenty-two of the 23 candidates on the list were victorious. The electoral battle in the Bekaa was not as heated as the previous rounds of voting.

In 1992, elections in the Bekaa were held on the basis of districts instead of governorates. This year candidates ran on the smaller district level but were elected on the basis of the larger constituency, the governorate. "This means all candidates have to rely on the votes of all religious groups," Khalil Hariri, who won a seat, told the *Weekly*. "This is positive because it aims at eradicating sectarianism."

The elections in the south and the Bekaa were a test for Hizbullah. It managed to gain seven seats in parliament, compared to eight in the outgoing house. According to Sarkis Naoum, a columnist in the right-wing daily *An-Nahar*, Syria, which is the main power broker in Lebanon, wanted to clearly distinguish between Islamic fundamentalism and the resistance against Israel's occupation in South Lebanon and the west Bekaa.

Naoum told the *Weekly*, "Syria, which was the 'director of the elections', wanted to give

a signal to the international community, particularly Israel and the United States, that the regime in Lebanon is not fundamentalist. The Sunni fundamentalist Islamic Group and the Al-Basheh organisation also lost their seats in parliament. This was because there was a relatively high turnout at the polls and not all sects in Lebanon support such groups. This showed the real dimension of Islamic influence in Lebanon. Damascus pushed for the Amal-Hizbullah coalition in the south and the Bekaa to show there is a difference between fundamentalism and the resistance. The results showed Hizbullah gains in these two rounds and in turn means resistance will continue since it is an important card for Syria in peace negotiations with Israel."

Many analysts tend to agree that Syria wanted election results to indicate that Hizbullah remains strong in the south and the Bekaa. But they also say that Damascus used the poll to show Hizbullah the limits of its independence by helping to bring about Hizbullah losses in the north and Mount Lebanon and then forcing the group into a distasteful alliance with Amal.

The Shi'ite Hizbullah group has been spearheading the guerrilla war to oust Israeli troops from the zone they occupy in the south. It entered the political arena by fielding candidates in the 1992 elections.

During this year's poll, no massive Christian boycott was witnessed, as in the 1992 elections when a turnout of only 13.5 per cent was registered. The Interior Ministry said that there was an overall participation of 44 per cent during the five rounds of elections this year.

Even though there were calls by the Christian opposition in exile to boycott the ballots, leaders have decided to participate either as candidates or voters. But their representation in the new parliament decreased substantially and they are unlikely to form a major bloc.

Naoum said the opposition will be symbolic. "The Christian leaders who won are unlikely to cooperate with each other or with other opposition groups, since their views and

policies differ," he explained. "Someone like Boutros Harb is vying for the presidency and his ambition will mean that his policies will tend to be pro-government. Najah Wakim, who is an outspoken critic of the government and its programme, is unlikely to cooperate with other deputies or blocs. Former Sunni Prime Minister Salim Al-Hoss won but most of the members of his bloc did not. But they all have one thing in common... they will not oppose Syria's hegemony in Lebanon."

Supporters of the pro-Syrian government managed to score crushing victories in the elections, while Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri consolidated his power. The new parliament will feature a strong bloc of Hariri supporters. This is likely to give him greater freedom of action in pushing for his reconstruction projects than in the outgoing chamber. The last parliament did not back many of Hariri's projects, having been hesitant to let the government accumulate too many debts. Hariri also enjoys a solid alliance with House Speaker Nabih Berri who headed the biggest bloc in the outgoing legislature and now has another big bloc in the new parliament.

But Naoum believes there are no real parliamentary blocs except that of Hizbullah. He said: "Hariri may have 10 to 15 supporters, Berri between 18 and 20, and the resistance [Hizbullah] has nine supporters, seven of them party members. I consider the only real parliamentary bloc to be that of the resistance, emanating from the fact that it is an organised party. Berri may only be able to rely on the unconditional support of three to four supporters while Hariri has around three to five. I don't think that their blocs will be solid. This is because any contradiction with Syria's policy may cause rifts in the blocs. They are not one party."

In spite of this, the parliamentary elections in Lebanon achieved landmark victories for pro-government and pro-Syrian candidates. The incoming 128-member national assembly is predominantly unicolour. Pro-government blocs will prevail.

## Poll marginalises Maronites

Lebanon's Christians did not boycott the 1996, as they did the previous poll. They found the results disappointing however, reports **Amira Howeldy** from Beirut

The Lebanese parliamentary elections left a large number of the Christian population, mainly the Maronites, unhappy about its outcome. Out of 64 elected Christian deputies, there are only two influential and popular Christian leaders.

Most observers attribute this situation to the "exceptional" nature of the elections in the Christian-dominated Mount Lebanon province. The constituency was divided into six districts, thereby fragmenting the opposition and dividing the voters. Twenty-five out of the 35 seats of Mount Lebanon must be Christian in the 128-member half-Christian half-Muslim National Assembly. The results, however, came as a shock to the Christians because Albert Mokheiber, one of their most popular leaders, lost against the ticket of Interior Minister Michel Al-Murr. The opposition alleged that the government rigged the elections. Mokheiber's ally, Nasseb Lahoud, another Christian leader, won a narrow victory.

The second phase of elections in the North Lebanon district came as another disappointment, with the sole victory of Maronite opposition leader Boutros Harb. Harb is a potential nominee for the presidency of Lebanon after current President Elias Al-Hrawi's term in office expires.

In the Beirut district, incumbent opposition leader Nagah Wakeem struggled to win his seat, while the 16 Christian voters in South Lebanon and Bekaa governorates were considered lightweight.

As the new parliament prepares itself for the next four years, three main coalitions stand out: the Sunnis led by Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri, the Shi'ites led by former House Speaker Nabih Berri, and the Druze led by the Minister of the Displaced Walid Jumblatt.

The Christians, who contested the elections for the first time since the end of the civil war, complain that they do not have a strong coalition or leader in the parliament, despite the 64 seats they hold. Critics attribute this situation to Syria's wish to curb the opposition, led by the Maronites who strongly oppose Syria's presence in the country.

Farid Al-Khazen, a political science professor at the American University in Beirut told *Al-Ahram Weekly*, "The elections are over and we can see that the Sunnis, the Shi'ites and the Druze are represented by established figures. On the other hand, the Maronites are represented by Harbi, who may be one of the last popular Maronite politicians in the country. Also, all the strong Kata'eb (Phalangist) party's candidates lost the elections, while before the war they had eight seats in parliament."

MP Boutros Harb, who won in the North Lebanon district, told the *Weekly*, "The issue is not the Maronites or

Christians in particular. Rather it extends to all the opposition, especially those who were against the controversial Ta'if Agreement, which was not seriously implemented anyway."

Signed in the Saudi city of Ta'if in 1989, the agreement put an end to the 14-year-old civil war by re-distributing political power and increasing Muslim representation. The agreement, viewed as unfair by the Christians, was the reason why they largely boycotted the 1992 elections in response to the calls of their leaders in exile and in Lebanon.

"The government, in this year's elections, clearly confronted those who opposed Ta'if by preventing some of them from winning. It succeeded in doing so especially in Mount Lebanon," said Harb. But political analyst Faisal Salman, deputy editor-in-chief of *As-Safir* newspaper, countered, "It's no one's fault that the Maronites do not have a leader inside or outside the parliament."

The Christian politicians, he said, boycotted the 1992 elections and have not been active politically; therefore the people forgot them. In addition, he said, "They are divided, as is the case with each sect in Lebanon." But the main problem with the Christian community, especially the Maronites, said Salman, is that they still want to be the dominant community in Lebanon, as they were during the French occupation and before the civil war. "But this cannot be, because they are not more than 37 to 40 per cent of the population and are even given half the seats of the parliament. What more do they want?"

The division of Mount Lebanon into six districts, said Salman, was fair because "it was the only compromise the government could make in an area with a history of bloody conflicts, dominated by Christians who would not have given the Druze minority a chance to elect their representatives in parliament." Besides, he added, "the confessional nature of Lebanon makes it impossible to please everyone."

In a study of the 1992 elections conducted by a Lebanese research centre, a chapter on the "real representation" in parliament concluded that the Greek and Armenian Orthodox and Catholic candidates were dependent on the determining votes of the non-Christians. Al-Khazen blames Syria's control over Lebanon's internal politics for this situation. "The Maronites are the most vocal opponents of Syrian control. Syria has not yet succeeded in penetrating all Maronite organisations because there is resistance, especially in the Maronite Church. This explains why there is such a weak representation of Christian opposition in the parliament."

## Arabs assert normalisation link

The Arab League foreign ministers' meeting reiterated the Cairo Arab Summit recommendations on the peace process but it was the situation in Iraq which dominated informal sessions, reports **Doaa El-Bey**

The 106th session of the Arab League held last weekend in Cairo reflected Arab concerns regarding the pace of the Middle East peace process and recent developments in Iraq.

Significantly, for the first time since the Oslo agreements were signed, Palestinian President Yasser Arafat openly admitted to Arab foreign ministers that his recent meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, like the FNA-Israeli Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, was a failure in terms of steering committee talks, was a failure in terms of concrete progress in the Palestinian track. "I told my Arab brothers about attempts by Israel to freeze the implementation of what was agreed upon earlier and holding meetings that only have political facade," said Arafat after the emergency meeting he requested to brief the Arab ministers about the situation in the Occupied Territories. In effect, Arafat was putting the intractable problems pertaining to

Jerusalem, Hebron, and Israeli settlements in the hands of the Arab governments.

As expected, the three-day long meetings were not devoid of inter-Arab differences. In a closed meeting of the foreign ministers, differences arose between the Syrian and Lebanese positions, on the one hand and the Palestinian position, on the other. Syria wants fuller coordination to link the three tracks. However, Palestinian officials explained that they fear that such a step would give Israel the excuse to renounce on other commitments.

During the meeting, Syria demanded that normalisation with Israel be put on hold until progress is made in the peace process. Even though there was some opposition to this proposal, Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq Al-Shara stated on the second day of the summit that his country's proposal is gaining support.

At the end of the day, even though there was no formal statement linking normalising relations with Israel to progress in the peace process, Arab foreign ministers decided on the course of action to be put to Arab heads of state. The final impression is, however, that the impact of the proposals, statements and condemnations coming from these meetings was weaker than that of the Cairo Arab Summit held in June. That summit carried greater weight because foreign ministerial meetings were followed a day later by consultations between Arab presidents and kings. Then, the Arab heads of state had presented a common Arab vision of peace. In contrast, last week's Arab League meeting did not add to the recommendations agreed upon in Cairo in June.

On the question of Iraq, however, foreign ministers were more vocal. Although the US strike

against Iraq was not on the agenda of the Arab League meetings last week, there was a consensus that Iraqi territorial integrity should be maintained. Even Kuwait's Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah supported this view, saying that Kuwait does not welcome a division of Iraq.

An Arab League statement condemned the proposed Turkish buffer zone aimed at halting Kurdish infiltration. Once again, it was left to the Arab League Secretary-General Esmat Abdel Meguid to deliver the strongest view. "We will never tolerate any Turkish violation of the border with Iraq." However, he admitted that Baghdad had not asked the League to include the topic of the situation in the north of the country on the ministerial session's agenda. The League Council's final statement condemned foreign intervention in the internal affairs of an Arab League state.

Concretely, the meetings did not produce a direct message from the Arab League to the US on the recent attack on Iraq, in contrast to what some officials declared in private. One League official said: "The US must give up the use of force against Iraq in as much as the situation in Iraq Kurdistan is an internal Iraqi affair."

Another thorny issue was Iraq's implementation of UN Security Council resolutions. It was suggested that Arab states should find an Arab criteria for evaluating how well Iraq is implementing the resolutions in question. This would be instead of relying on the verdicts of Ralph Ekeus, head of the UN mission entrusted with dismantling Iraq of weapons of mass destruction. All Arab ministers agreed that the oil-for-food deal must be implemented as soon as possible to alleviate the suffering of the Iraqi people.



# 'No problems with Iraq'

For the first time since the Kurdish issue came into prominence again with the recent Iraq-US Gulf crisis, Turkey's President Suleiman Demirel, whose country is a key player in the arena, has spelt out his government's position on security-related issues, including relations with Israel and the Arabs. In an exclusive interview with **Omayma Abdel-Latif** in Ankara, Demirel said Turkey was going ahead with its plan for what he called a 'Danger Zone' on the Iraqi side of the common border to ensure Turkish security. The zone will be five to 15 kilometres wide and Turkey will keep tabs on it by remote control and not a permanent military presence. His implication was that Turkish troops would go into the zone only in pursuit of Kurdish separatists of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) trying to infiltrate into Turkey. To allay Arab fears, Demirel said Turkey's recent military agreement with Israel was merely a training accord and was identical to pacts Turkey had already signed with eight Arab countries as well as Iran.



## What is your assessment of the current crisis in northern Iraq?

We are following the recent developments in Iraq with deep concern. From the beginning, we invited the parties to refrain from the use of force. We have called on all parties to exercise the utmost restraint in order to contain the conflict and prevent further escalation. We believe that foreign intervention will only further complicate the situation. It is an unfortunate development for the suffering Iraqi people and for embargo-affected Turkey that the course of events has caused the postponement of the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution No 986. I do hope the resolution will be put into effect in order not to further punish the Iraqi people and give Turkey a partial relief.

## But will Turkey go ahead with the security zone plan in northern Iraq?

Yes. The latest developments have created an atmosphere for the PKK to play rough shod in northern Iraq. The PKK will try to infiltrate our borders in order to carry out cross-border attacks and step up its terror campaign. The recent developments in Iraq have aggravated the already existing power vacuum in the region and Turkey is faced with the necessity of taking a series of appropriate measures in order to maintain its own security and protect innocent civilians. So within this context we decided to consider an area running parallel to our border with a width of five to 15km, depending upon the geographical situation, as a temporary Danger Zone. There will be no permanent military presence in this zone, but it will be kept under control by various intelligence and surveillance means. This new measure will in no way infringe upon Iraq's sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity. On the contrary we are defending the territorial integrity of Iraq.

Some have raised fears that this might be similar to the Israeli buffer zone in southern Lebanon?

During the last strike, Turkey maintained a low profile. Where exactly does Turkey stand?

What is going on is part of the Gulf crisis which continues and we did not take a position. We did not condemn or approve. It is a complicated case and there is a fight and Turkey does not want to be involved. We do not have any problems with the Iraqis. Iraq's problems are with others: the US, Britain and France.

But you were part of an alliance that

want to attack. But I do not think the US will strike at northern Iraq again because there is no need to. There is operation Provide Comfort which is defensive and not aggressive and it is only meant to protect northern Iraq from Iraqi aggression.

Will Turkey allow its air bases to be used by American planes in case the US wants to strike again at Iraq?

We did not discuss this issue with the US defence secretary when he was in Ankara yesterday.

But will Turkey allow that in case it was asked by the US?

It depends on which part of Iraq they

## fought against Iraq?

There is no such alliance now. As far as Turkey's position is concerned we are part of a coalition called Provide Comfort to protect northern Iraqis. This Gulf alliance was only in 1990-91 but it is gone now.

## The Kurdish problem has been a cause of growing concern for the Turkish government. How do you perceive a settlement to this problem?

There is no such thing as a Kurdish problem. Turkey does not have a Kurdish problem. There are people in this country who call themselves Kurds. They have been living here thousands of years and they have no problem with the Turkish state because they are part of it. Our citizens living in southeast Anatolia are an integral part of our nation. Our problem is with the terrorists of the PKK whose violence has claimed thousands of lives. The Turkish security forces have so far been effective to a large extent in suppressing violent terrorist acts of the PKK inside Turkey but the threat does still exist.

Turkish Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan has recently called for a conference that would bring together Syria, Iran, Turkey and Iraq to find a settlement for the Kurdish

issue?

I do not believe this meeting will be held but the foreign ministry officials of these countries have been getting together for several years and there might be higher-level contacts among these countries because we do not want a Kurdish state in northern Iraq. The main issue on the agenda of these meetings is to abort any attempt that aims at creating a Kurdish state in northern Iraq.

Do you think there is room for improvement in Turkish-Syrian relations especially since Premier Erbakan is planning to visit Syria?

It depends mainly on the Syrians. For our part, Turkey desires to maintain friendly relations and promote cooperation with Syria but the most important factor which hinders meaningful cooperation is the continuing Syrian support for the PKK. While

Syrian officials claim that PKK presence in Syria is not tolerated, yet we have evidence that the leaders of these organisations are still residing in Syria. So the Syrian support for the PKK continues unabated and the number of terrorist infiltrations into Turkey have increased in the last 12 months. I told President Hafez Al-Assad this several times during our meetings and we urged the Syrians to take the necessary measures to prevent terrorist activities directed against Turkey emanating from Syrian territories. But if a neighbour is supporting bloodshed, it should be blamed for this bloodshed.

You once stated that Turkey was against any military bloc in the Middle East because it would hinder all peace efforts in the region. But some view the Israeli-Turkish military agreement as a possible alliance in the making. What is your view?

There is no Israeli-Turkish alliance, nor will there be one in the future because there is no need for it. Whom should we ally against? Our brotherly Arab countries? There is no threat coming from any Arab country against Turkey. The Military Training Cooperation Agreement between Turkey and Israel is solely a training agreement and this accord is not against any third party. Turkey has signed such military agreement with eight Arab countries as well as Iran.

Our views were conveyed to the Egyptian side at the highest level. During my meeting with President Mubarak during his brief visit to Turkey, he stated that the Egyptian side was satisfied with the information given by our side and that they considered the matter closed.

But Syria, for example, believes this military agreement to be threatening its national security especially by allowing the Israeli forces to use Turkish air space and territorial waters to carry out their training?

It should be made clear that our relationship with Israel is not meant to

create hostility with other countries, but the Syrian concerns may emanate from being misinformed or miscalculating the situation. We have told the Syrians many times that this accord was not aimed against them. But Syria, on the other hand, maintains good relations with Greece and we are not saying that Syria should not have good relations with the Greeks.

Another problem which is causing great concern in both Iraq and Syria is the water issue as Turkey is accused of controlling the water flow from the Euphrates, therefore affecting the water share of both countries. What is your own view?

These are unfounded accusations because Turkey has been releasing sufficient

and that a joint team of Turkish, Syrian and Iraqi experts conduct these studies. But both Syria and Iraq do not agree and insist on sharing the rivers flow by dividing it into three equal parts. This, in fact, is one of the main reasons why Turkey proposes a scientific way of allocating the Euphrates water. Rejecting this method inevitably leads us to arbitrary and political water demands.

But what about the dams on the Euphrates?

They are under construction. But dams are not going to cause harm to Syria. On the contrary, they are regulating the river.

Will Turkey attend the Baghdad conference on water due to be held next November between Syria and Iraq?

It depends on what the purpose of this conference would be. If it is going to talk about dividing the water, I do not know. But we will ask them how much water do they need. We are not going to talk about sharing water. There is plenty of water that is good enough for everybody.

With the coming to power of an Islamist prime minister, some raised concern that this would be a sign that secularism is in danger?

Secularism is not under threat in Turkey and will not be under threat. It is part of our constitution and our way of life and we think we should continue this way.

## What is your assessment of Egyptian-Turkish relations?

The strong ties based on common history and shared values constitute the basis of the excellent relations between Turkey and Egypt. I am confident that in every field these relations will continue to develop. There are no political problems between Turkey and Egypt. There are even similarities in our position regarding bilateral, regional and global issues, and these elements help us to draw a parallel between our foreign policy priorities, and facilitate the development of our cooperation on the bilateral as well as international levels.

## Turkish interests come first

Turkey is going ahead with its plan to establish a security belt on Iraqi soil despite Arab criticism, reports **Omayma Abdel Latif** from Ankara

As Iraq's neighbours waited in nervous silence, Turkey revealed plans to establish a security belt on Iraqi soil. This security zone is intended to prevent further attacks from the separatist Kurds of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) headed by Abdullah Ocalan, or a repeat of the influx of Iraqi Kurds into Turkey.

"When you leave a central government in power even though it has lost control of its northern and southern regions, and when you leave an embargo in place, it is a very dangerous recipe," said one Turkish journalist of Iraq. "You have to expect that other countries in the region will use this power vacuum to their own advantage," he added.

In Turkey, politics are played out on a field delineated by the army, according to one Turkish diplomat. The angry response of the Arab world to Turkey's security zone plan was not heeded by army leaders.

"If the Turkish army believes it is a necessary step, they will implement it without considering how it will be received in the Middle East," the diplomat said.

Hasan Koni, head of the Ankara-based American-Turkish Strategic Institution, however, believes that the security zone plan was a policy that could have been used before Massoud Barzani, leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, achieved success in northern Iraq. However, "Taking into consideration the current developments, it is unlikely that a security zone will be of any benefit to Turkish interests. Empowering Barzani or helping Saddam

or even creating a no-man's land in the 150 Kurdish villages on Turkish soil, will be less costly than occupying Iraqi territory," Koni added.

But Selcuk Gulbasly, news editor of the Istanbul-based Zaman newspaper, told the Weekly that Turkey does not trust any of the warring factions in northern Iraq, including Saddam Hussein himself. "Before the Gulf War, Saddam made attempts to play the PKK card against Turkey, so he is not to be trusted to keep the PKK forces from attacking Turkish targets. Turkey will have to carry out the security zone plan using its own troops. This is not a practical plan. Eventually, the Turkish troops will come face to face with Saddam's troops since this so-called buffer zone will be elastic and might cover more than 20km inside Iraqi territory," said Gulbasly.

Sources at the Turkish Foreign Ministry reported that Foreign Minister Tansu Ciller said on Monday, after talks with US Defence Secretary William Perry, that Turkey was still determined to go ahead with the security zone plan. This, despite Iraq's warnings that it will take all possible measures to defend the integrity of its territory.

On Monday, Turkish newspapers reported that Turkey was still working on persuading Iraq to accept the Turkish proposal. Ambassador Yasar Yakis, the Turkish envoy to Iraq, said in a news briefing on Monday, that Turkey has asked Baghdad again to agree to its plans for a security zone across its borders or undertake to

ensure the borders' security with its own troops.

"Ankara said that the presence of a temporary security zone on Iraqi soil would be helpful to Turkish troops; they would cross the borders to hunt down PKK militants. But the Iraqis still object, saying that it violates Iraqi sovereignty," Yakis said.

Although Turkey has accepted to extend the mandate of the Provide Comfort programme for aid to the Kurds, it has expressed growing concerns that the power vacuum in northern Iraq created by the operation has benefited the PKK. It has allowed them to establish bases in the area, from which they continue their terrorist activities in southeastern Turkey.

Mesut Yilmaz, leader of the centre-right Motherland Party, shrugged off accusations that his country holds any 'expansionist interests' in northern Iraq. "Turkey has legitimate security concerns and we began talks with allied partners on how to modify the operation to take into account these concerns. Turkey's continued aim is to insure Iraq's territorial integrity. The security of Turkey's borders can only be safe by putting an end to northern Iraq's present position as a safe haven," Yilmaz told the Weekly.

Meanwhile, Turkey has agreed to the US request of assistance for the evacuation of those Kurds who helped the CIA in northern Iraq. Ankara said that they had considered the transit passage request from a "humanitarian point of view."

Even though the exact number of the ap-



Iraqi Kurds cross into Turkey on Sunday, under a US asylum programme for Kurds who worked for American-led missions, including Operation Provide Comfort officials. 2,500 people are expected to take advantage of the asylum. (photo: AP)

licants was not revealed, Turkish sources estimated it at 2,500 people. It was not known whether they had worked for the CIA or not, but Koni said most of them worked as agents for the US government. "They evacuated 2,500. But who knows, twice as many may be left behind to keep an eye on American interests in this part of the world," said Koni.

Meanwhile, US Defence Secretary's visit to Ankara was met with a cold Turkish response. Many editorials in Turkish newspapers harshly criticised US policy in the region. Ilnur Cevik, a prominent Turkish columnist wrote on Tuesday, "According to public opinion polls, [US President Bill] Clinton is getting a domestic booster as he spans Iraq. But as usual,

Turkey is on the losing end."

"As the US can make arbitrary decisions and wreak havoc in our region. But it is also a fact that it has to live with the reality of losing the friendship of the Turkish people. Turks cannot be pushed around as they have been in the past few weeks by the West."



# Why Mao mattered

Was Mao Zedong a blight on the world or a boon, asks **Gamal Nkrumah**

To bandy words with apologists of Mao Zedong's excesses is not a useful exercise. What must be borne in mind is that to manage the concerns of a quarter of mankind takes fortitude, even ruthlessness. I am inclined to agree with the official verdict of the Chinese leadership that Mao's thought was "70 per cent right and 30 per cent wrong." One cannot laugh the verdict off. Nor can one speak disparagingly about one of the greatest leaders of the 20th century. Last week marked the 20th anniversary of his death. Many African states have turned to Taiwan for economic aid in the 1990s. Even post-apartheid South Africa declines to have diplomatic relations with Beijing. Pretoria prefers to stick to its traditional ties with Taipei.

For the past two decades among Western liberal circles the name Mao Zedong has been mud. Mao is taking a lot of flak these days for launching and ruthlessly executing the Cultural Revolution of 1965-69. Books like Jung Chang's *Wild Swans*, which Colin Thubron of the British weekly *The Spectator* described as moving "like a ghastly oriental fairytale" denounced Mao and his mission. But Mao's contribution cannot be brushed aside. Moreover, Thubron's description laid bare the Western sense of superiority and racial prejudice, which stems from the fact that the West, or Europe, was for the last five centuries the dominant political, economic and cultural centre of the world.

Mao was instrumental in fostering the new assertiveness which characterises Asian dealings with the West in the international arena today. Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad and Japanese politician and novelist Shintaro Ishihara co-authored *The Voice of Asia* and argued that as the balance of power slips inexorably towards Asia, the West is forced to take Asians more seriously. West-

erners are obliged to acknowledge the Asian world view and come to grips with Asia's emerging ethos. "The future belongs to Asia," the authors argue.

Until very recently, Mao's name reverently reverberated in the ruins of Machu Picchu, the ancient Incan city high in the Peruvian Andes and one-time stronghold of the Peruvian Maoist group called the Shining Path. In the hills overlooking the rugged Albanian Adriatic coastline, too, Mao's name was venerated. Enver Hoxha, Albania's late communist leader, was sympathetic to Mao's philosophy and was suspicious of the revisionism of the Soviet and Eastern European regimes. So were a host of non-Western leaders who saw the former Soviet Union as essentially a European and Western power. China was seen as a champion of the Third World cause.

The merits of Maoism have never been acclaimed by all Marxists. But whatever the ideological differences between the communist Moscow of yesterday and Beijing, the crux of the matter was that the Sino-Soviet split had racial overtones. Mao's China was regarded as the embodiment of the so-called "yellow peril" — Moscow was not.

Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, the foremost Arab political writer, told me that Mao's rise to power and China's "great leap forward" were perhaps the greatest single events of relevance to the colonised peoples of the Third World this century. China was never a member of the Non-Aligned Movement. "The Chinese Revolution was among the most momentous happenings this century," Heikal said. "It left an indelible mark on all succeeding historical developments in the second half of the 20th century. The Chinese Revolution was undoubtedly the most significant event in the post-World War II period, marking a watershed in the history of the co-

lonised peoples of Africa and Asia. The awakening of the sleeping Asian giant defined and animated the spirit of the 20th century. In retrospect, it is easy to criticise Mao and his Cultural Revolution. But the essence of his vision was to empower the Chinese youth to break the old order."

Mao emerged on the Chinese political arena soon after the founder of the Chinese Republic, Sun Yat-sen, during the dying day of the Qing dynasty. Mao's mission was to bring down the millennia-long mandarin bureaucratic barriers that proved to be a bane of the Celestial Dynasty of the Middle Kingdom. There was no room for Western-inspired individualism. He experimented with an old-new Asian value system. Mao perhaps relied on the Asian tradition of collectivity. Jung Chang puts it thus: "I had been brought up in the tradition of regarding the interest of the whole nation as my own duty."

Another Mao fan, Kwame Nkrumah, coined the phrase neo-colonialism in his book *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. But China was the first country to experience neo-colonialism. China was nominally independent, but in reality it was subject to controls by several European powers. The entrance to the pre-World War II international concession zone in Shanghai read,

*"The Chinese Revolution was among the most momentous happenings this century... The awakening of the sleeping Asian giant defined and animated the spirit of the 20th century"*

**Mohamed Hassanein Heikal**

the 20th century has been dominated by the Third World's liberation and Asia's economic miracle. "Asians know we can have the baby of affluence without the bath water of Western values. Cultural convergence sounds fine, but the attempt to force it provokes a backlash and needless conflict," Ishihara said.

Deng Xiaoping, the architect of economic reform, set China on a new path. President Zemin is Deng's designated heir and it appears he intends to continue the journey charted by Deng. The Asia-Pacific economy is growing and integrating without a political framework such as the European Union. So China can politically develop separately from its neighbours, even though it matches them economically. Total Chinese gross domestic product is estimated to reach \$840.4 billion in 1996, up from

\$695 billion last year. Real GDP growth was over 10 per cent in 1995. GDP per capita stood at \$574 in 1995 and is estimated to be \$683 this year.

Today, in sharp contrast to Mao's day, sub-regional economic integration is emerging as the latest phenomenon in Asia. There is the highly successful South China economic sphere: the economic integration of South China and Hong Kong. Others are in the making, such as the Taiwan Strait economic sphere: the economic integration of China's southeastern coastal Fujian Province and Taiwan. In Mao's day, few could have imagined economic integration with Taiwan possible — not after the fleeing of Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist forces across the Taiwan Strait.

Mao's legacy cannot be discounted. He tried to marshal support for the South in a country that historically regarded all outsiders as uncivilised "barbarians". China's record in Africa is marred by costly miscalculations. Beijing sided with the Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania against Nelson Mandela's African National Congress. It also supported Jonas Savimbi's UNITA against Angola's ruling MPLA. But many Africans still sing his praises. Mao married Marxism-Leninism and a peasantry-based nationalism, and Third World revolutionaries read his *Little Red Book*.

Mao gave a new lease of life and plausibility to the idea of Third World assertiveness. The book *China Can Say No: Political and Emotional Choices in the Post-Cold War Era* (1996), edited by Zhang Xiaobo and Song Qiang, is a bestseller in China today. Japan's Ishihara also authored a book entitled *The Japan That Can Say No*. China can say no. Japan can say no. India can say no. Africa can say no. Mao played no small part in encouraging the South to just say no.

## Shades of racism

With Le Pen embroiled in legal battles with the French establishment, neo-Nazis are hurting politicians' sensibilities, writes **Hosny Abdel-Rahim** from Marseille

"The races are unequal. It's what every Frenchman thinks privately," declared National Front (FN) leader Jean-Marie Le Pen at the party's annual rally in Paris last week. Reports from France indicate that French Justice Minister Jacques Toubon is considering prosecuting Le Pen for his racist remarks. Elisabeth Guigou, leader of the Socialists in the French National Assembly, insisted, "French law condemns racism. The law must be applied to Le Pen."

With due respect to Guigou's well-meaning public statement, French law cannot always be relied upon to fight racial injustice. In fact, the harsh immigration laws of former French Interior Minister Charles Pasqua — which deny residency permits to even long-standing immigrants — have been condemned by many opposition leaders precisely because of their inherent racism. A recent example of these laws was evidenced in the forcible evacuation of 300 illegal Africans from the sanctuary of Saint-Bernard Church in Paris, where they had sought refuge. "Among European countries, France has acquired the unique distinction of solving its immigration problems through the use of force," commented political analyst Francois Bonnet.

Although the French left and many prominent intellectuals have categorically denounced the development of an encroaching racist social and political climate, the right's flirtation with and accommodation of the far-right FN's programme have given Le Pen much leeway. Like the historical German and Italian brands of fascism, FN ideology exploits the working class's deep fear of losing its hard-earned livelihood. With unemployment rates up from three per cent in the early 1970s to the current 12 per cent, youth unemployment at the 24 per

cent level and close to one million people on the welfare rolls, workers' fears are made tangible.

Le Pen successfully manipulates this anxiety — the fear of being next in line — by targeting alien Arabs and Africans, who allegedly cause unemployment by flooding the market and usurping jobs that should rightfully go to the French. He also blames the foreigners for the decaying moral fabric, the deteriorating infrastructure and the rising crime rate. By playing on the ultra-nationalist theme of communal solidarity, based on white Judeo-Christian ethics, against the twin threats of "African underdevelopment" and "Islamic terrorism", the FN has managed to mobilise a sizeable segment of the working class.

In this increasingly racist environment, Le Pen's statements do not necessarily appear as shocking as Pauline Green, the European Parliament's Socialist Group leader, seems to believe they are. "The words of Le Pen bear echoes of Europe's darkest days," she proclaimed. "They are intolerable to the modern Europe that we are building on the ruins of fascism, on the ashes of the ideology of which Le Pen is a direct descendant."

In reference to the French government's handling of its immigrant population, analyst Bonnet is less optimistic about modern Europe. "Our so-called immigration policy produces nothing more than a series of violent conflicts, where virulent and pious ministerial declarations attempt to camouflage the authorities' often arbitrary and racially motivated deportation of Africans," he said.

Meanwhile, at the end of last week, the corpse of a 14-year-old French boy called Nicholas Bourgat was found in downtown Marseille. The FN staged a demonstration last Saturday in France's largest Mediterranean city to coincide with Nicholas' funeral. Nicholas was killed in an attack

for which an unnamed 15-year-old boy of Moroccan immigrant origin has been charged.

The Bourgat family, especially Nicholas' father, spoke out against the FN demonstration. The wishes of the father for a peaceful and private funeral were deliberately ignored by Le Pen and his supporters. Le Pen retorted that the position taken by Nicholas' father against the FN demonstration did not matter. The FN's deputy leader, Bruno Mégret, warned, "The father of the victim, by making so many public statements, has turned private tragedy into a public and political event which concerns all French people." Supporters and members of the FN clashed with French police on 14 September in Marseille. It was one of the most vicious clashes between the FN and police in recent weeks.

Marseille Mayor Jean-Claude Gaudin, also France's urban affairs minister, called for calm and dignity on the day of Nicholas' burial. Gaudin refused to ban the FN demonstration on the grounds that such a move could disrupt the day of mourning. Some 7,000 FN supporters cheered as Le Pen pronounced Gaudin guilty. Le Pen called Gaudin "the real guilty one" because he represents a government that has failed to act adequately to stop immigration.

Nicholas' murder, Le Pen's derisive and racist remarks and the FN demonstrations have fuelled tensions in Marseille, a city with an exceptionally high immigrant population because of its nearness to North African capitals across the Mediterranean. The FN wants all North African immigrants deported. Le Pen won 15 per cent of the vote in the 1995 presidential election. It is a sad reflection on the French political scene today, but the FN is often regarded as the deciding force in French elections.



## Philly to France

By **Mumia Abu-Jamal**

After a century of mega-exploitation of Africa's north and central regions, the "mother country" sends the children and grandchildren of their former colonies back home. France screams at Africa: *allez-vous-en* (go away)!

Commenting on Keita Fodeba's poem *African Dawn*, Franz Fanon, in his classic *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), said: "To understand this poem is to understand the part one has played, to recognise one's advance and to furnish up one's weapons. There is not a single colonised person who will not receive the message that this poem holds. Naman, the hero of the battlefields of Europe, Naman who eternally ensures the power and perennality of the mother country, Naman is machine-gunned by the police force at the very moment that he comes back to the country of his birth; and this is Setif in 1945, this is Fort-de-France, this is Saigon, Dakar, and Lagos. All these niggers, all these wogs who fought to defend the liberty of France or the British civilisation recognise themselves in this poem by Keita Fodeba."

For the better part of this century, the French Republic has drawn its sustenance from what it termed its overseas territories, or what might be better called "exploited lands", which were subjugated, conquered and bled as colonies of a so-called mother country.

The raw materials, historical relics, slaves and later cheap labour flowed from Africa — and parts of Asia — to Europe. Indeed, from 1895 to 1959, France governed a vast range of Africa, including nations now known as Mali, Senegal, Mauritania, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Niger, Ivory Coast and Benin. It also governed much of North Africa, like Algeria and Tunisia. Tens of millions of black and brown people, whose

lives, lifestyles, languages and futures were governed by a relatively small nation in Europe for the better part of a century.

Now, as shown recently in the church expulsion of over 300 African immigrants from France, the mother country is expelling its former "colonials". A five-day hunger strike by Malian and Senegalese immigrants failed to deter a French riot police raid on the 18th century St Bernard Church in the Goutte d'Or (Drop of Gold) neighbourhood of Paris. In late August, they were forcibly removed from the chapel, most to be expelled from France.

As European economies — and the American one as well — begin to falter, right-wing forces appeal to white supremacist instincts to blame the foreigners ("strangers" in France, "Auslanders" in Germany and "wetbacks" in America) for job losses and economic woes. What of the economic, social, political and psychological havoc wreaked on the "colonies" for generations?

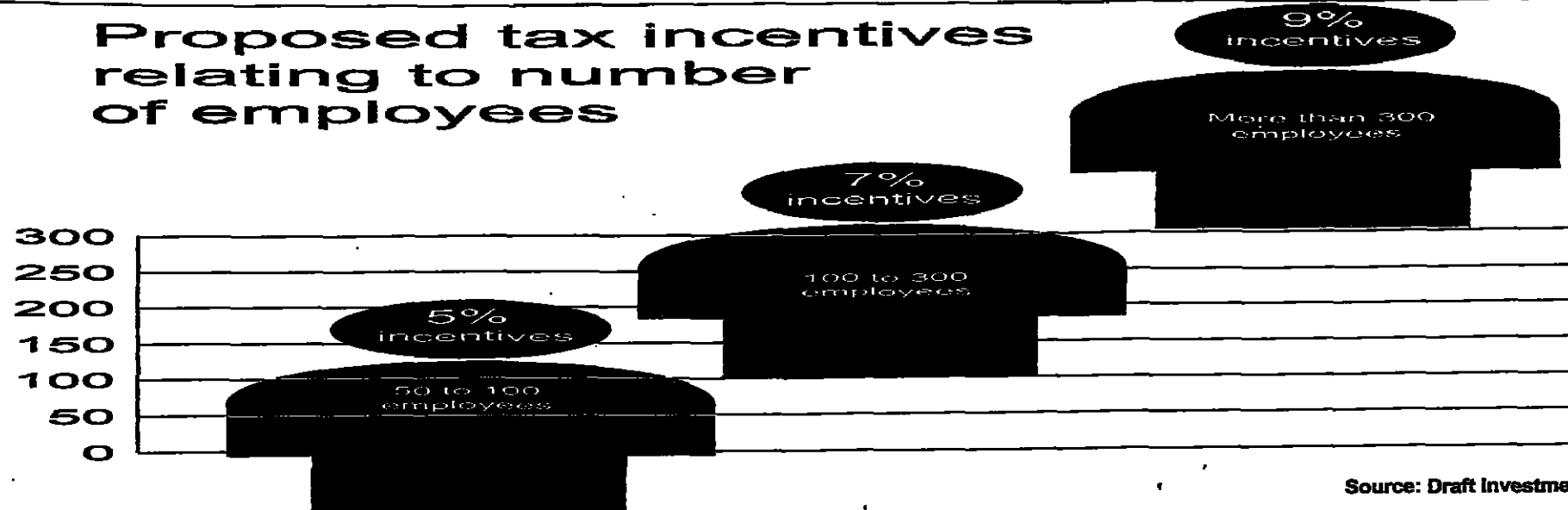
For African Americans, faced with a domestic brand of apartheid, France became a haven from US repression, and artists like Miles Davis, Nina Simone, James Baldwin, Richard Wright and Josephine Baker drew their first free breaths of air on French soil, as exiles.

It is thus painful to see the hatred and anti-African animosity aimed at our neo-colonial brethren who face imminent expulsion. But a painful truth is a truth nonetheless. We stand with the African immigrants and say, "Down with the expulsions!"

This piece was written by acclaimed African-American journalist Mumia Abu-Jamal from his death row prison cell in Philadelphia, the United States, dated 28/8/96.



## Proposed tax incentives relating to number of employees



Source: Draft Investment Law

# A single companies law in the pipeline

After a whole year of debates, the government will present to parliament a legislation package aimed at boosting investment and cutting through red tape, reports Gamal Essam El-Din

In an effort to boost economic development and double the number of investment projects, the cabinet this week began discussing a new Unified Companies Bill aimed at all kinds of companies and investment projects. Atef Ebeid, the minister of the public sector, announced in a press conference last week that the government decided to refer the 278-article draft law to the People's Assembly for discussion and approval during its next session scheduled to begin in November.

Ebeid said that the draft law is part of a package of three new economic laws which include an Investment Incentives Law and a Commercial Transactions Law. This package, he said, seeks to help achieve an "investment boom" and overcome a number of legal obstacles created by the array of investment laws currently in force.

The government's decision to scrap the current investment legislation and group their articles into three new laws comes after a year of heated debates over the proposed Unified Companies Bill. Sharp criticism and objections voiced by businessmen in the past were repeatedly cited as the main reason why the bill, in its initial form last year, was shot down in the Assembly.

According to Mahmoud Fahmy, a former president of the Capital Market Authority and

the main author of the bill in its initial form, the present laws governing companies and investment activities in Egypt are not only numerous, but also varied and conflicting in terms of the issues they tackle. Fahmy, who is also a legal expert, said that Egypt has eight main company and investment laws, and most of them are riddled with conflicting clauses and articles.

The new bill, however, will group all of these articles into one comprehensive piece of legislation, the Unified Companies Law. This new law will simplify incorporation procedures and the means of raising the necessary capital, as well as liquidation measures. It also seeks to encourage individuals to establish new private businesses in a variety of sectors. Equally important, he said, the new law is in line with the state's liberalisation policies and its efforts to switch to a free market economy.

He stated that in its revised form the bill provides for the establishment of "a specialised administrative authority" which has the sole right to license new companies. The Companies Authority, as it is expected to be known, will also provide a number of basic guarantees that the companies will not be subjected to nationalisation or sequestration without due process of law. It also states that they will not be stripped of their property for the

purpose of public interest, and will not be forced to accede to a mandatory pricing system for their products or services.

Mostafa El-Said, a former economy minister and chairman of the Assembly's Economic Committee, noted that because the new bill entrusts one administrative authority with corporate licensing procedures, this step will greatly improve the investment climate in Egypt since onerous time-consuming bureaucratic procedures will be minimised.

For similar reasons, the government decided to group a number of different investment incentives into one law. Fahmy explained that the Investment Incentives Law primarily focuses on stimulating investments in order to encourage projects in Sinai, the Western Desert, Upper Egypt and the New Valley. He explained to the Weekly that the new investment incentives bill introduces a new tax exemptions structure far removed from the existing one. This new structure is based on proportional tax reductions, not complete exemptions. The percentages of these suggested tax reductions, said Fahmy, range from 3 to 25 per cent, and could be increased if this proves to be necessary during later discussions on the bill. Moreover, these reductions will be provided depending on a number of factors including the location of the project and the percentage of local man-

ufacturing in the production and introduction of new technology.

However, Fahmy emphasised that the tax exemptions for existing projects will not be negatively affected by the new bill. The new tax incentives system is superior to its predecessor in that it will lead to an increase of investment projects and the number of workers employed, encourage the upgrading of production and raise exports.

Discussing the new Commercial Transactions Bill, the third of the comprehensive package of legislation, Public Sector Minister Atef Ebeid told reporters that the bill mainly aims to speed up the settlement of commercial disputes. The law, which is the brainchild of the Egyptian-US Presidents' Council, an offshoot of the Egyptian-US Partnership for Economic Development Programme, is also part and parcel of the government's strategy to attract foreign investors. In the past investors were reluctant to invest in Egypt because of the lengthy and complicated judicial procedures.

According to Mohamed Abul-Enein, a member of parliament and of the Presidents' Council, the new law will amend Article 65 of the Commercial and Civil Litigation Law, by putting a time limit on the settlement of commercial disputes in court.

## Arab development and integration — one road

With a meeting between Arab ministers of economy and trade set to take place in Cairo on 21 September, Taha Abdel-Alim evaluates how ready the Arab world really is for economic integration

During the late 1970s, the "oil boom" caused by the rise in crude oil prices seemed to herald a boost in economic relations between the Arab countries, especially those in the Gulf region. The impetus gained, mainly after the October 1973 War helped alleviate financial distortions in the so-called "deficit" countries' economies, while also reaping benefits for the "surplus countries." As a result, the region witnessed an increase in trade, financial assistance for development projects, labour migration, worker remittances and public and private investments. In short, this seemed to point to the birth of a new era of regional economic activity with regard to inter-Arab trade. It also suggested that the long-desired goal of an integrated Arab economic system may indeed be realised.

However, 20 years later, efforts by Arab countries to integrate in the fields of development and industrialisation have yielded little in terms of narrowing the widening gap between Arab economies and those of the developed, industrialised countries — or even those of newly-industrialised states.

In light of the new global reality characterised by predominantly integrated economies, this shortcoming poses a significant problem for the Arab world. Moreover, it can only hold threatening consequences when one envisages the proposed new Middle Eastern market system which, to date, seems to have taken little account of the interests of the Arab countries.

The Arab summit held in Cairo last June tackled the issue of establishing an Arab free trade zone. But the establishment of such a zone, in itself, raises some pertinent questions on the reasons surrounding the low level of inter-Arab trade and the ways in which it can be boosted. In order to tackle these questions, the level of inter-Arab trade over the last three decades must be traced.

Over the past 30 years, inter-Arab trade has fluctuated in relation to the price of oil. Prior to the oil boom of the 1970s, the trade between the countries of the Arab world was slow, despite the conclusion of several agreements facilitating inter-regional trade.

However, coinciding with the oil boom, inter-Arab trade nearly doubled in value, only to drop again as the price of oil decreased. In the early 1990s, the trade increased slightly, again due to an increase in oil prices. As a whole, figures dealing with Arab trade since the 1970s reveal that the level of inter-Arab trade has remained at modest levels when compared to trade between the Arab countries and those outside the region. From 1975 to 1980, inter-Arab trade accounted for a meagre annual average of 5.2 per cent of total Arab imports.

An analysis of the geographical distribution and commodity mix in Arab trade with countries outside the region reveals structural causes for the relative fragility of inter-Arab trade. The first is that the developed, industrial countries have cornered the greater part of Arab trade with foreign countries. The second is that in terms of the diversity of commodities included in Arab foreign trade, manufactured goods accounted for the majority of total imports. In 1975, imports to the Arab world from developed countries accounted for 70.6 per cent of total Arab imports, and increased to 72.4 per cent in 1980.

The fragility of inter-Arab trade has been compounded by the overall inclination of Arab countries to trade with industrialised countries more than with other Arab nations. For example, in 1975, Arab imports from European Economic Community (EEC) countries, the US and Japan accounted for 64.39 per cent of total Arab imports, while Arab exports to these same countries were 61.6 per cent of total Arab exports. And, although inter-Arab imports multiplied three-fold during the latter half of the 1970s — from \$3.756 billion in 1975 to \$11.168 billion in 1980 — these figures fluctuated during the 1980s, dropping to \$11.106 billion in 1993. Moreover, from 1982 to 1989, trade with the EEC, the US, Canada and Japan accounted for roughly 65.2 per cent of total imports to Arab countries, and these same countries were the recipients of about 60 per cent of total Arab exports. Between 1989 and 1993 exports between Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries accounted for only 7.6 per cent of their total exports.

Although Arab international trade has expanded notably due to the increase in exports and imports by the Arab oil countries, particularly those of the Gulf, inter-Arab trade has remained at its characteristically low levels, increasing slightly in relative value and in commodity mix. This marginal increase was due to the improved industrial development in Arab countries, and is also one positive result of the inter-Arab trade agreements, especially those falling within the framework of regional bodies such as the GCC. One may also conclude that the role of inter-Arab trade in boosting Arab economic integration, though vital, remains limited.

Inter-Arab trade promotes investments, reduces costs, and maximises profits. It expands job opportunities, boosts competition and produces levels of affluence resulting from economies of scale. However, without an acceleration in industrial development, and a diversification of production capabilities at the local level, the liberalisation of trade will not result in a more extensive and comprehensive Arab economic integration. In this context, the relative predominance of the Gulf oil states, particularly GCC members, is an integral part of promoting inter-Arab trade. The oil fortunes of the Gulf countries, in the 1970s when oil prices rose as well as in the '90s when oil prices fell, have been the mainstay of development for inter-Arab trade. Surplus from oil revenues led to increased assistance for development projects, an increase in labour migration, and, in turn, increased inter-Arab trade.

Despite the fact that these relations have fallen short of integrating or upgrading the Arab economies, they have provided significant channels for income redistribution and mutual benefits among the Arab countries. Therefore, the reasons are clear why inter-Arab economic relations are relatively frail. The Arab economies suffer a crisis of economic underdevelopment. There is clearly an absence of a comprehensive industrial and technological development strategy, as well as an absence of the high standards necessary for successful participation in the global economy. These shortcomings limited the possibilities of utilising the market financing, labour and investment resources of Arab oil countries, particularly in the Gulf region.

It is also pertinent to mention here that the often repeated platitudes on "redistribution of Arab wealth" is no more than a panacea. Nothing could be more harmful than a slogan which implies that Arab economies may be developed, while nothing is being done to improve the prerequisites for inter-Arab economic relations.

On the contrary, the "wealth redistribution" slogan has actually reinforced the inclination to withdraw from collective Arab action, fuelling instead feelings of mistrust and driving wedges between Arab governments and their peoples.

Finally, with the economic not being divorced from the political, one must point out that self-destructive incidents such as the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait have led to dire consequences for Arab efforts to adjust to changes in the new world order.

The writer is head of the Economics Unit at Al-Ahram Centre for Strategic Studies.

## Cotton brightens up

An ounce of prevention coupled with a pound of cure may have saved this year's cotton harvest, reports Reem Lella

According to a report prepared by the Economic Affairs Department at the Ministry of Agriculture, the area of land earmarked for the cultivation of cotton increased to 920,000 feddans this year. Last year, 720,000 feddans were cultivated.

According to Galal Mouawad, head of the Research Centre for Protecting Plants, the increase in the area of land cultivated is part and parcel of a series of steps taken by the government to encourage farmers to plant cotton. These steps included guaranteeing growers a minimum delivery price of LE500 per qantar (1 qantar = 50kg), and making available to farmers the necessary fertilisers and pesticides.

Although the cotton crop was seriously affected by the boll worm, indicators show that the fierce war waged by the Ministry of Agriculture has been instrumental in saving the crop. The ministry's plan relied heavily on reducing the amount of pesticides used, which in the past totaled 24,000 tons, and increasing the use of manual harvesting of crops afflicted by the boll worm. The ministry also doubled the number of airplanes used for spraying the affected areas.

Yassin Osman, head of the Agricultural Guidance Department at the Ministry of Agriculture, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that along with the above-mentioned steps, the ministry has offered training programmes for agricultural engineers and farmers. These programmes highlight the best cultivation and harvesting methods for cotton.

"It is true that at the beginning of the season, the boll worm had infested nearly 65 per cent of the cultivated area," said Osman. "But the min-

istry was able to control the situation immediately by implementing this new plan."

With the threat to this year's harvest nipped in the bud, Osman projected that the harvest will increase to 8.5 million qantars this year. Last year's harvest brought in 5 million qantars.

"This is considered to be the highest cotton yield Egypt has realised since 1990," he said. Much of this increase is also due to the fact that farmers are now more familiar with and ready to implement the new measures.

"In the past farmers used 70kg of fertilisers per feddan but now, they use only 25kg," noted Osman. "Our target for the near future is to reduce this quantity to 8kg per feddan."

Farmers like Gaber Abdel-Latif admit that the assistance provided by ministry engineers was instrumental in overcoming their various problems. According to Abdel-Latif, from the start of the season, officials were helpful. For example, he recalled, at the beginning of the season the supply of irrigation water was inadequate and the boll worm infestation was widespread. "As soon as we informed the concerned officials in the governorate, more water was let into the canal...and the agricultural engineers helped us overcome the boll worm problem," he said.

Saad Nassar, head of the Agricultural Research Centre, a Ministry of Agriculture affiliate, has set up several committees to monitor the cotton crop in all the governorates. "These committees were formed to follow up on the cotton harvest on a daily basis, and to take any precautionary measures necessary to protect it," said Nassar.

In a bid to reduce Egypt's dependence on imported wood, which costs the country some \$3.5 billion annually, the government is considering a plan to expand the cultivation of artificial forests that do not require excessive water resources and are compatible with Egypt's dry climate.

Amin Okasha, head of the Ministry of Agriculture's Horticulture Research Institute, said the ministry has approved a project to cultivate 500,000 tropical African mahogany trees annually. The wood of these trees, which are naturally found in the African rain forests, is proven by ministry research, to be stronger than that of beech trees. Moreover, these trees are characterised by their ability to survive both on fresh and sewage waters, making it possible to grow them around sanitary drainage stations. African mahogany trees have already been successfully cultivated in the Aswan Botanical Gardens and the Kom Ombo Horticultural Station. The ministry, said Okasha, began cultivating mahogany trees on a small scale about 28 years ago.

The expansion project should be instrumental in lowering Egypt's wood import bill in the future, said Ahmed Abdel-Dayem, head of the Forestry Department at the Horticulture Research Institute. Along with the African mahogany nursery project, he said, there are several others for the cultivation of artificial forests, of which the five-year-old Abou Rawash forest at Giza is the oldest. The forest has about 10,000

trees, mostly camphor. And in Luxor, another 10,000 trees have been cultivated on 50 feddans. Another artificial forest is also being planned for the 10th of Ramadan City.

According to Abdel-Dayem, Egypt enjoys a number of factors that facilitate the cultivation of artificial forests, the first of which is an abundance of vacant land. Second, there are enough water resources to irrigate the land on which these trees will be planted. The main source of water will be sanitary and industrial drainage supplies, which the trees are able to use given their ability to absorb carbon dioxide gas.

"Wood trees are considered a means of conserving water as they help reduce the amount of water vapour emanating from the surrounding bodies of water," he said. "The trees help reduce the velocity of the wind and, therefore, increase the level of humidity in the air." The ease and low price of developing nurseries aids in cultivating artificial forests, added Abdel-Dayem.

The only real drawback to the plans is that artificial forests take a long time to reach maturity, he said. For investors, the capital turnover for trees which grow quickly is between 8-12 years. Trees which take longer to grow, such as the African mahogany tree, require about 20-25 years. Given this time frame, only the government will be able to undertake this initiative because of the heavy investment required, stated Abdel-Dayem.

## Market report

### Telemisr tops trading

THE GENERAL Market Index (GMI) inched up by 0.06 points during the week ending 12 September, closing at 235.05 points. The volume of transactions reached LE287.78 million compared to LE380.08 million the week before.

Almost mirroring the GMI, the manufacturing sector's index gained a meagre 0.04 points, reflecting gains accrued by the shares of 26 of the sector's companies. By the end of the week, the index closed at 290.05. The trading spotlight fell on the Egypt International Pharmaceuticals Industries Company, whose shares gained LE25 before closing at LE145. Shares of the Paints and Chemical Industries gained LE23 and closed at LE820. Milling companies managed to spin themselves an increase in share value this week, as the South Cairo and Giza Mills and Bakeries Company gained LE6.45 to close at LE54, while those of the North Cairo Mills Company increased by LE3.5 and leveled off at LE100.

Meanwhile, offering 76 per cent of its shares through the stock market, the Arab Radio, Transistors and Electronic Equipment Company (Telemisr) traded 1.525 million shares, accounting for 32.71 per cent of total market transactions. Telemisr had originally floated 20 per cent of its shares, but a surge in demand prompted the company to increase its offering.

On the opposite end of the balance sheet, shares of the Alexandria Spinning and Weaving Company were the sector's biggest losers, dropping in value by 6.11 per cent to close at LE22.1.

The financial sector was given a much-needed boost by the Misr International Bank's (MIB) 10 per cent equity offering. The new MIB issue accounted for 40.53 per cent of total market transactions, with LE116.64 million in shares changing hands. The bank's stock closed at LE310. Shares of the Egypt-Emirates Investment Company gained an impressive 78.57 per cent of their opening value and, by the end of the week, had closed at LE25.

Trading in bonds was next to nothing compared to share transactions. While there were 176,988 share transactions, there were only five bond transactions.

In all, the shares of 40 companies increased in value, 16 decreased and 31 remained unchanged.

Edited by Ghada Ragab

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# Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

Much has been documented about Qasem Amin, author of *The Liberation of Women* (1899) and *The New Woman* (1901). These highly controversial works earned their well-known author the epithet "the emancipator of women".

Nevertheless, certain obscure matters regarding these books and their author are brought to light by *Al-Ahram*, a contemporary witness of the future they provoked. Several of its editions, therefore, provide us a first hand account of one of the rare and outstanding intellectual battles of modern Egyptian history.

Such intellectual battles usually erupt at times of important historical transition. It is vain to believe that an idea germinated in the mind of a single man, however intelligent and however good-intentioned, can single-handedly change the prevalent values of society and the predominant intellectual convictions. Some extensive groundwork must come beforehand. In Egypt, the half century that preceded the publication of Amin's works was replete with sociological changes that helped to create a climate generating readiness to accept his ideas. The former ruling Turkish aristocracy which had perpetuated the harem system had eroded, giving way to the emergence of new social strata from the Egyptian middle class. This *effendi* class consisted of the ranks of native employees in the rapidly growing central government of that period and those who became engaged in the liberal professions, notably lawyers and jurists. These rising classes would be open to change and more tolerant of new ideas, if only marginally.

Qasem Amin was very much a part of this new climate. It is true that he was of Turkish origin — not Kurdish stock as is commonly believed. However, the majority of his acquaintances and colleagues whom he would influence and who would influence him were Egyptian, particularly jurists, such as Saad Zaghloul, Ibrahim El-Halabi, Ahmed Lutfi El-Sayed and Ahmed Fathi Zaghloul.

Yet, by the turn of the century, even those of Turkish origin had lost much of their former import. Since the reign of Mohamed Ali the trend was for this former aristocracy to become culturally Egyptianised and to mingle with the local population. It is our belief that the members of this social class, one of whom was Qasem Amin, were bolder than others in their push for change. It was this group as a whole that, after the gradual introduction of privately owned property, would become the bulk of Egypt's large and middle agricultural landowners. As such, they had considerable economic and political leverage. And, by virtue of their social standing, their descendants had the fruits of high standards of education.

Qasem Amin had inherited broad tracts of prime agricultural land in Beheira. After graduating from the School of Law, he was sent to Montpellier to complete his studies. In France he had the opportunity to come into contact with French culture and society, and he fell in love with a French

woman. Upon his return to Egypt, he quickly scaled the occupational ladder in the judiciary to become a senior counselor at law. It was at this juncture of his career that he wrote his two famous books.

At the same time, the unprecedented European presence in Egypt, and the interplay between the Europeans and Egyptians, offered frequent opportunity to draw tangible comparisons between the two different cultures. Although the majority of Egyptians scorned the behaviour of these newcomers and clung to the belief that this behaviour spelled the end of European civilisation, a goodly number of Egyptians approved and even admired certain aspects of European attitudes. Among these was the high degree of freedom which European women enjoyed. Our "emancipator of women" fell into this category.

That female education, which had its inception in Egypt under the Khedive Ismail, inspired hopes among its advocates for broadening its scope. Although the government's endeavours in this domain were limited, the French and American missionaries and the educational enterprises of prominent Egyptian women had, by the end of the century, made considerable headway.

None of this could have taken place were it not for new trends of thought that were sweeping the Egyptian intellectual climate, and which manifested themselves in the works of some of Egypt's most prominent thinkers. Several decades before Qasem Amin was to make his mark, Sheikh Rifaa Rafie El-Tahawi had written *Al-Murshid Al-Amin li-Bihar wa Al-Batin* (A Faithful Guide for Girls and Boys) to mark the occasion of the inauguration of Egypt's first school for girls under the Khedive Ismail. As such, Tahawi prepared the ground for Amin's writings on the emancipation of women. It is true that Tahawi never advocated outright abolition of the veil as Qasem Amin did. However, he did make what appears to be a pioneering appeal for co-education when he said, "Boys and girls should be taught together so that education may enable women, if circumstances so demand, to assume the occupational responsibilities of men to the best of their skills and talent." At the same time, Tahawi did cast a shadow of doubt on the relationship of clothing — "whether it is concealing or revealing," as he put it — to chastity. "In sum," he wrote, "impropriety in the chaste comportment of women derives not so much from whether they are veiled or not, but from poor upbringing."

It is against this background, therefore, that we must view Qasem Amin's works. In particular, we are concerned with *Al-Ahram*'s contribution to the ensuing storm his works provoked. *Al-Ahram*, by contrast, backed Qasem Amin from the onset. But already it had made its position on women's issues clear several months before his first book appeared. On 25 February 1899 it wrote, "We have learned that the book which has recently been completed by the eminent scholar and counselor at the National Court of Appeals will soon be presented for

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Qasem Amin was indisputably modern Egypt's first major champion of women's rights. His crusade, embodied in two books published in 1899 and 1901, earned him the title of "emancipator of women". He advocated the abolition of the veil for women, arguing that it was no guarantee of virtue. He had numerous critics and detractors, but the newspaper *Al-Ahram* sprang to his support, as Dr Yunan Labib Rizq recounts in this instalment of his *Diwan* series



publication. This work represents important research into the value of women's education in enabling nations to make their ascent on the ladder of civilization. The greatest cause for the backwardness of the Orient is that women are kept in ignorance, contrary to the teaching of Islam which calls for the education of women."

Qasem Amin is known to have adhered to a very strict daily routine. He would go to work in the morning and return home in the late afternoon. He would spend the early evening until 7pm with his family, after which he would retire to read in his study until 10pm. Then he would leave home to spend the remainder of the evening, sometimes until 1am the following morning, in conversation with his friends. During these intellectual sojourns, it was not unusual for him to read out chapters of the book he was composing.

The previously cited quotation from *Al-Ahram* makes us strongly suspect that a representative of the newspaper was also present on at least some of these occasions and this would be the newspaper's editor-in-chief himself, Bichara Tagla, who was no stranger to such literary salons where such luminaries as Mohamed Abdal, Saad Zaghloul, Ahmed Lutfi El-Sayed would appear.

That *Al-Ahram*'s owner and editor-in-chief would support Amin's views stems in good part from his Syrian-Christian origins in Mount Lebanon. This community, which began to appear in great numbers in

Egypt in the latter half of the 19th century, had traditionally been more open to concepts of European modernisation due to their exposure to French culture and education.

When *The New Woman* appeared in print, *Al-Ahram* gave it a warm welcome. On the second page of its 20 May edition, it featured an almost full-page review of the book. The author of the review wrote, "The book contains the finest thoughts regarding the education of women, their function in the social fabric and in the family, the veiling of women from the religious and social perspectives, marriage, divorce and polygamy, and the importance of knowledge and the dissemination of learning." He then praised "the marvellous chapters and beneficial academic research with which this book enlightens minds and promotes the advancement of nations." Because he knew which way the winds would blow with regard to this book, the reviewer was careful to stress that "Islamic law was the first to call for equality between men and women. In Islamic law the instruction and education of women are unshirkable duties, contrary to what many Oriental people believe. The veil of today is no longer the veil that prohibits women from acquiring the benefits of learning and experience and brings upon the social body in the Orient degeneration and decline." Qasem Amin's courage should be commended, he said. "He did emulate other learned Muslims who have spoken much on this grave matter but who have never undertaken as bold a venture as

this." Evidently Bichara Tagla, who was in Alexandria at the time, did not feel that the single article above was sufficient to underline the importance of the book. Two days later he featured an article, taking up most of the front page, that lauded Amin as "a man who has served his religion and his country in a manner that few have done before". In the service of his religion, Amin "has refuted the claims of adversaries of Islam who have disparaged the beliefs of Muslims as an obstacle to reform and civilisation, while the truth is that the teachings of Islam contain nothing of this sort whatsoever, a fact which the author substantiates with numerous citations from the Qur'an and religious texts. Such is his enthusiasm for the book that the author urges Qasem Amin to have it translated into French. This way the book will serve a dual function, he wrote, "for it will also inform foreigners that women in the Orient are not as enslaved and subjugated as they believe."

*Al-Ahram* was not as forthcoming in defending the book against its critics. Commenting on *The Reliable Rebuttal of Qasem Amin* by Abdel-Maguid Effendi Kheiri, the maths instructor at Gamaleya School, *Al-Ahram* wrote, "It saddens us that some writers such as the author of *The Reliable Rebuttal*, should persevere in their defence of the old when the only salvation for Eastern nations is to relinquish the harmful aspects of their old customs." Another example was the newspaper's response to *The Education of Women* by Mohamed Talaat Harb, "functionary in the Royal Suite". Talaat Harb (who would later acquire fame as an economist) was lauded by the Egyptian press for his book, which was described as providing the most cogent answer to the liberation of women. Although *Al-Ahram* was unable to deny this, it expressed some surprise at Harb's contention that women are not as mentally equipped as men, who should have priority in education.

Such was the assault against his first book that Qasem Amin decided to respond in the form of a second book, *The Education of Women* (1901), which *Al-Ahram* welcomed as a continuation of this author's struggle "to elevate the status of the oriental woman". This time *Al-Ahram* adopted what appeared to be a more cautious tactic. "We will defer comment on this new tome so that we may afford the opportunity to explore it in depth, rather than offer idle praise, for the objective of this work is to clarify the truth, and truth is the child of study." Two weeks later, however, *Al-Ahram* fulfilled its promise to its readers in a series of front-page articles, the first of which appeared on 4 February 1901. These articles, as Tagla put it, "pay the debt we owe to the author, not simply because he ventured to write on this subject, but because he has persevered in the face of criticism and censure. He refused to despair, unlike the Oriental man who quickly succumbs to opposition. Rather, he continued ever forward like the intrepid individuals in the West who have already revolutionised

the social structure in Europe by virtue of their writings, fearless of the tyranny of the rulers, unflinching before the ignorance of the mob."

One passage of Amin's book in particular captured Tagla's attention: his argument that the backwardness of the Orient in general was the result of the degradation of women. This applies, according to Amin, to the Muslims as much as it does to the Indians, Chinese and all inhabitants of the Orient with exception of the Japanese. To Tagla, it was clear why Amin made an exception of the Japanese. "The Japanese have progressed, not only because they have acquired the sciences of Europe, but because they had no reason to adhere to the principles of their ancient ancestors as do the Chinese and the Orientals in general, and if the Japanese had stuck to those principles, they would not have achieved such success." Proof of this, he argues, can be found in the fact that there are many more Ottoman subjects than Japanese studying in Europe, but with entirely opposite results.

In another article, *Al-Ahram* cited numerous recent news stories that served to justify Qasem Amin's claims. One item reported that a man subjected his wife to a severe beating because she had left the house to visit her mother. In another incident, a man was so incensed at catching his wife looking out the window that he struck her so hard that she fell over onto a lamp, which started a fire causing them both to burn to death. On a third occasion, when a wife refused to cook her husband's meal, he beat her violently and cut her hair. How, *Al-Ahram* wondered, could Qasem Amin's critics have disregarded such behaviour and then presumed to fill the columns of newspapers "on a subject that is really the preserve of religious scholars."

*Al-Ahram* is distressed to find such a gap of misunderstanding between Amin and his adversaries. "They see only his call to lift the veil and not the reasons behind it. They imagine that he wants to bring women out of their protective seclusion and to expose them immodestly in the streets and this enrages them. But this is not his intent at all. He believes that the education of women will enable them to become better housewives, closer partners to their husbands and more competent to raise their children."

In conclusion, Bichara Tagla writes, "This small movement will be the greatest event in the history of Egypt. Qasem Bek Amin did not swerve from his endeavour to fulfil our nation's aspirations by the fact that he was unheeded by the general public nor by the furore of his critics, the sarcasm of those who disagreed with him and the arrogance of those who refuse to recognise his good intentions."

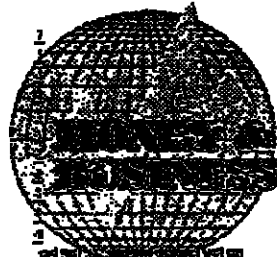
The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.



## Successful youth project

ABDEL-Moneim Omara, head of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports, announced that the first phase of the Young Entrepreneur's Project achieved success. The council received so many requests from those wishing to participate in such an experiment that it was decided to further publicise this experiment. Omara added that the second phase of the programme will include training entrepreneurs on the means of operating small ventures. Nearly 100 young men and women are expected to take part in the second phase.

## MONEY & BUSINESS



## PMEC to sponsor seminar

A SEMINAR entitled Training and Effective Performance: The Strategic Pivot for Managing the Future, will be held at the Ramses Hilton from 8-10 October 1996. The seminar, organised by the Professional Management Expertise Center (PMEC), headed by Abdel-Rahman Tawfik, will deal with aspects of effective performance for the future; re-structured training; gauging performance and evaluating training activity, as well as technology and the information revolution and their effect on performance training.

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## Igedo Düsseldorf from 1-3 September 1996: Orders placed with care and deliberation

AT IGEDO Düsseldorf, which took place from 1-3 September 1996, around 20,000 trade visitors placed more orders for spring/summer 1997 and autumn/winter 1996/97. Autumn fashion has been selling well in the stores in the past few weeks and the fashion sector was able to breathe a sigh of relief.

Thus at Igedo Düsseldorf, the trade placed 18.2 per cent of its probable volume of advance orders and 10.4 per cent of its budget for repeat and additional orders for autumn/winter 1996/97.

Exhibitors reported that business was brisk but the tense situation in the fashion sector could not be concealed.

Igedo Düsseldorf showed that many retailers already anticipate the new "4 seasons" concept so that they can react to consumer wishes more quickly with new selections. Over 50 per cent of the planned budget for additional orders for autumn/winter 1996/97 has not yet been placed. And the slight increase in the share of advance orders from 51 to 63 per cent reflects the realistic attitude of the retail trade.

### Visitor structure

The fair has crystallised into the forum for the small and medium-size retail trade. This sector of the retail trade accounted for 80.9 per cent of the visitors, dominating the fair, and thus also contributed to fashion pluralism.

Sixteen per cent of the visitors came from abroad. In

line with tradition the fair was well-attended by visitors from the Benelux states, Scandinavia, Austria and France. But trade visitors were also registered from the USA, South and Central America and Asia.

Tempered by the attractive selections of the manufacturers of bridal wear, it was interesting to note that there was an increase among the retailers from this sector by a total of 10 per cent.

### Corporate fashion

Buyers from this sector were delighted by the perfect arrangement for suppliers of Corporate Fashion in Hall 4. Many new contracts were made and existing business contracts intensified on the first day of the fair. Fashionable workwear as a special product group of Igedo Düsseldorf has been accepted as a new range at the fair. Some people interested in the next event, with the new 1997 Igedo date set for November, have already been registered; the fact that it coincides with the A+A Trade Fair (work safety and occupational health) is seen as the ideal complement. As a result it is already clear that next year the world's biggest event for corporate fashion in Düsseldorf will provide the best possible overview.

### Product interest

The greatest interest was in garments such as skirts, pants, blouses, jackets, but special interest also focused on coats, jacket trenches

and the long jacket forms with zippers. Orders for dresses in a swingy silhouette or dress/jacket ensembles also went well. The evening, cocktail and bridal wear sector is traditionally also very important; the international spectrum meant that this sector was able to show many new ideas.

### Fashion résumé

The collections generally reflected a strong trend towards sportiveness. The casual look that provides comfort is continuing. There was again more demand for leather wear in all variations and colours. Aqua colours such as ocean blue or sea green dominated. Ankle-length is favoured. In bridal wear the simple line dominates with refined décolletés and drapings. Small costumes or trouser suits for second weddings were among the bestsellers.

### The shows

The many shows and events helped to intensify the feeling and experience provided by the fair. The world of fashion met in Düsseldorf.

The Bestseller Show on Sunday morning provided the best overview of orders so far and quickly showed where there was still room for action.

The Igedo Professional Show was a concentrated selection of 15 exhibitors at the fair and presented casual wear, leather creations and a variety of cocktail, evening and bridal wear.

The lively shows in the creative Show Centre dis-

played fashion for every wish and mood. The daily Creative Shows showed unconventional fashion by European and overseas designers.

"Test the Tent" was the message at the daily shows by the young fashion talents who drew attention to themselves particularly through unusual cuts and materials. The shows of the designers from Latin America, India and Portugal also met the highest demands.

### TW Hearing

On the second day of the fair the TW Hearing was held before a full house. The talks and bargains trust showed that the 4 Seasons concept started in 1997 is

urgently required in order to focus more strongly on the customer again and at the same time to increase the speed of stock turnover in the small and medium-size retail trade. "Stock turnover and yield" should be translated with emotion and fun. The 4 Seasons concept was regarded by the whole sector as the chance for clearer and more targeted collections.

### The next dates:

CPD Düsseldorf: 20-5 February 1997  
Igedo Dessous: 2-4 February 1997  
CPD Follow-up: 9-11 March 1997  
Igedo Düsseldorf: 20-22 April 1997

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## Al-Ahram Weekly

### CIA at play

Old habits die hard, and those of the US foreign policy machine seem to be the most tenacious in clinging to life. The CIA, an institution which has recently and repeatedly come under the Congressional spotlight as being unable to cope with the post Cold War world order, is still at its old tricks, despite the hesitation and consternation of key US policy makers. And while many of these decision makers feel that the containment and interventionist strategies so prevalent before are now *de mode*, these policies are still used to define US foreign policy strategies.

This much was clear with the CIA funded and supported effort to overthrow Iraq's Hussein by backing Iraqi dissidents and Kurdish separatists. As news of this Bush administration covert operation continues to surface, one must wonder if the US has learned from past experiences like the overthrow of the Mossadeq regime in Iran, which eventually paved the way for the rise of Khomeini. Or, more directly relevant, the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion which not only failed miserably, but also cost the Kennedy administration tremendous loss of face.

The same containment strategy used in Cuba has been fired up again, this time against Iraq. Clinton has explained his action as part of a plan to contain Iraq. The CIA operation was designed to overthrow him. But, as with Castro and the Bay of Pigs, Hussein has neither been overthrown nor contained.

More alarming is that despite the fact that countries like Egypt have explained time and time again that the vehicle of regional political reform is compromise and negotiation, not cloak and dagger operations, these words have fallen on deaf ears. But why waste time negotiating when the maverick approach is much more exciting.

Clearly, Bush and later Clinton have been working under the glib assumption that by starving the Iraqi population and financing dissidents and separatists, enough people will side with the cause of "truth, justice and the American way" and overthrow Hussein. And perhaps they also believe that giving Israel copious amounts of political slack is the best way of securing regional peace and stability. After all, why bother with the negotiating table when there is the CIA.

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# Pursuing a realistic regional role

Under Mubarak, Egyptian diplomacy has salvaged wounds and taken critical initiatives, writes Taha El-Magdoub

With the end of the Gulf War and the beginning of the peace process, Egypt's role in the Middle East entered a new phase. The past five years have demonstrated the reinvigorated vigour and increasing influence that have enabled Egypt to persevere and breathe new life into the peace process.

As Egypt's regional role expanded, a new conception of a Middle East cooperative arrangement emerged. This is very disturbing in terms of timing, substance, and the pressures for speedy implementation. Cairo was fully aware that the propositions for economic, technical, scientific and environmental cooperation evolved within a closed circle of influence that sought to promote Israel as the cornerstone of the system. Such an arrangement does not conform with the nature of mutual cooperation in the region. Egypt made this point loud and clear during the first economic summit in Casablanca in 1994, when it emphasised the regional and international role of the Arab nation.

Egypt has succeeded in maintaining a balance between its peace with Israel and the exigencies of peaceful transformation in the Middle East. It has reaffirmed its right to exercise its role on behalf of Arab national interests by striving to establish the foundations for regional peace and a comprehensive settlement based on justice and equality. Egypt has also proved itself particularly adept at turning relations with Tel Aviv to its advantage in pressing for the Arab cause.

Egyptian diplomacy has been equally active on other fronts of central concern to the Arab world. It has taken a clear stance with regard to Iran, a country adjacent to the region and of particular strategic consequence. It is in our interests to establish stable and productive relations with Iran, but that does not imply that Iran should be part of a regional security arrangement or that Iran's strategic considerations should be allowed to

conflict with those of the Arabian Gulf. Its seizure of three Gulf islands constitutes an assault that cannot be countenanced and its support for terrorism is entirely inimical to the security of the whole region. Egypt has held that Iran's efforts to alleviate the effects of the US policy of containment should not be exerted at the expense of Arab interests. It is also Egypt's position that the US presence in the Gulf, whether autonomously or through bi-lateral agreements, need not conflict with Egyptian/Arab political and military cover, but rather strengthens it.

Turkey, another border nation, is also an Islamic country with which Egypt shares many common goals: the eradication of terrorism, economic transformation and participation in the Middle East and Mediterranean cooperative arrangements. But these joint interests do not give Turkey the right to exploit crises in Arab-Israeli relations, and drive the region into a confusion of new realignments and political configurations. Advancing Syria's military position in order to pressure Israel and Iraq over such vital matters as water only further complicates an already convoluted peace process.

Egypt's activity is founded upon an integrated and cohesive policy that takes into consideration fundamental realities in its prioritisation of the Arab world's strategic interests. The dynamism of Egyptian diplomacy has filled a vital gap, as it seeks to expand the range of realistic options and gradually brings the prospects of Arab national convergence within closer reach.

Therefore, when Egypt, backed by Syria and Saudi Arabia, proposed the recent Arab summit meeting in Cairo, it was fully aware that the timing and circumstances were propitious. The suggestion was received with immediate and unanimous approval. Egypt's policies were reflected clearly in the results of the conference pertaining to various Arab issues: the Arab stance towards Israel, the peace process, and countries contiguous to the Middle East.

The writer is a retired major general and former assistant to the foreign minister

## Netanyahu, enemy of peace

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed argues that, with Netanyahu pursuing a definite line that is openly hostile to peace, the Arab world should develop an equally unequivocal counter-strategy

Anyone who thinks Netanyahu has not crystallised his concept of peace and his strategy of action three months after assuming office would be mistaken. Although his youth makes him suspect in the eyes of Israel's old guard, even within his own party, he enjoys wider prerogatives than any previous Israeli prime minister. Thanks to Israel's new election law, he was voted in not only as the leader of the Likud but also in his personal capacity. This means he is not a slave of the party line.

It can safely be assumed, therefore, that he knows exactly where he is headed, even if appearances indicate otherwise. For his line is deliberately ambiguous, not only towards the international community, including the Arab parties, but even towards Israeli society. Actually, there are signs that Netanyahu's line had already been formulated even before he was elected, and that it was neither the line he pledged to follow during his electoral campaign nor the line he now claims to be following.

This is borne out by at least two specific incidents, both of which took place before Netanyahu came to power. The first was a message Netanyahu sent through his personal adviser, Dori Gold, to a number of key Arab leaders, urging them to place all their cards on a Peres victory, but to meet with him before the elections, as such a meeting would facilitate reaching an agreement if he came to power. But most Arab leaders were unwilling to shake public

confidence in Peres, and it was finally only King Hussein who responded to Netanyahu's call. Throughout his electoral campaign, Netanyahu used a language that was at total variance with the feelings he was secretly sending out to Arab leaders, indicating that he was ready to adopt a pragmatic political line very different from the firebrand declarations he was at the time making to Israeli voters. It seems he was more interested in defeating his Labour rival than in challenging adversaries outside Israel.

The second incident is a proposal Netanyahu made over a year ago in connection with the stalemate on the Syrian front. Noting that for security reasons Israel was not ready to relinquish the Golan in its entirety, while Syria was not ready to make full peace with Israel, including total normalisation of relations, he proposed that the possibility of exchanging partial withdrawal for partial peace should be investigated. What he was in fact proposing was that peace should not be perceived as a package deal, a comprehensive process beginning with the Madrid conference and ending with contractual peace agreements on all fronts, but only as "the art of the possible".

This approach goes far towards explaining Netanyahu's Lebanon-first proposal, which he has not abandoned despite its rejection by the Arab parties. It surfaced in his negotiations with Clinton a few days ago in Washington, as well as in David Levy's talks with Jacques Chirac in Paris at

the same time. Both Netanyahu and Levy insisted that Lebanon-first did not mean that Syria would be excluded from Israeli-Lebanese negotiations. The real aim of the proposal is to involve Syria in negotiations with the Netanyahu government at a time the latter still insists on not endorsing the land-for-peace principle, thus setting a precedent for de-linking peace from restoration of land.

The same approach applies to Netanyahu's dealing with the Palestinians. His statement that he only meets Arafat "when it is necessary" confirms that he meets him not as an equal partner in a peace process and not on the grounds of the mutual recognition of legitimate rights on either side, but in an exploitative logic whereby one side uses the other as an instrument by which to further its own ends.

The key idea behind the Netanyahu approach is that the rules established in the peace process launched in Madrid, which were formally observed, if not always rigidly applied, by the previous Labour government, should no longer be binding on Israel. Obviously, he cannot renounce the previous line as reflecting only the views of the Labour party, and not those of the democratically elected government of the state of Israel. It is because he cannot come out and say this openly, either to the American administration or to his Arab partners in the process, that his strategy seems to be shrouded in ambiguity, while in actual terms it is not. For Netanyahu,

what is optimal for Israel is not what is maximal for the peace process, which, in his view, must remain purely selective, not comprehensive. The peace process is accepted as a guide for action only to the extent that it can help bolster Israel's security: it is rejected if the restoration of occupied territories to the Arabs is perceived by him as detrimental to Israel's security.

If this is the Netanyahu line, which is inimical to the very idea of a mutually acceptable peace, the Arabs should counter by requiring Netanyahu to respect the principles established by the peace process since Madrid. If Netanyahu refuses to comply, the battle must be taken into Israeli society itself, which, given the wide diversity of views in Israel on the peace process, constitutes Netanyahu's most vulnerable front.

For this 'intervention' to be successful, Arab popular forces — and not only the Arab states — should do everything possible to alienate the majority of Israelis from Netanyahu's intransigent line. To build up such a majority, Arab popular forces must be willing to express open solidarity with all Israelis ready to recognise legitimate Arab rights, namely, the right to a Palestinian state, Jerusalem as the capital of both states, the exchange of land for peace and the renunciation by Israel of its settlements policy. Arab-Israeli fraternisation on these principles is a challenge to the forces of peace on both sides of the confrontation line.

### Matters of health

By Naguib Mahfouz

I am frequently questioned about the state of my health which I consider a very personal matter. One person wrote to ask specifically how my right arm was, and whether I could use it. He also wanted to know about my eyesight and hearing.

Well, my general health is reasonably good. My morale, on the other hand, is excellent, thanks largely to Dr Yehia El-Rekhwai. He assembles my friends in the afternoons to visit me so that I do not feel isolated as a result of the attack and is in general charge of my rehabilitation. Dr Rekhwai's treatment I consider as important as the surgical operation I underwent following the attempt on my life.

As for my right hand, it is making steady progress, so much so that after not being able to use it at all I now can eat without assistance. I have also begun to write fairly legibly.

As for physical exercise, I walk up and down in my house for at least half an hour before going to bed.

I cannot discuss the state of my health, however, without expressing my deep gratitude to all those who were so solicitous for my welfare. Besides Dr El-Rekhwai, my thanks are due to the surgeon Dr Sameh Hammad and all the staff of the Police Hospital.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmany.

### Pressing co-operation

peace, to foster the growth of economic cooperation." (Mohamed Basha, 16 September)

**October:** "America, our friend, is behaving strangely. It supports Israeli stances while calling upon it to change them. It strikes at Iraq and prevents it from moving its forces within its borders. It is silent over Turkish intentions yet threatens to strike at Iraq for the third time. It implements economic cooperation with us and encourages US investments in the Arab world while its intelligence cooperates with terrorists who want to reduce the Arab region to anarchy. America, there are limits to what can be accepted... and friendship has only one face." (Editorial, 15 September)

**Rose El-Youssefi:** "Peace should be real rather than theoretical. There should be ways to turn the peace process into tangible reality under which economic and other projects can go ahead. We agreed with Israel on peace. Now it wants our surrender. We should not proceed in any direction until we get it clear: is it peace or surrender? Until then, no conference can be held." (Mahmoud El Tahami, 16 September)

**Al-Shaah:** "This is the first time ever that we hear that an economic conference is held under coercion and armed threat, a conference that has been called the conference for economic cooperation between Israel and the Arabs. It is true that pressure was exerted previously after military defeats to impose a political settlement, but this is the first time that a conference is held to create a common market by force. The US continues to prepare for it as though there were no government in Cairo. And when Egyptian officials express reservations about holding this conference, the US State Department spokesman describes these reservations as 'short-sighted' and refuses to accept any other alternative." (Editorial, 13 September)

**Al-Mussawar:** "What is the difference between Saddam Hussein's overrunning Kuwait and Washington's action in supporting Turkish plans to occupy part of Iraq? What awaits the world when today's only superpower, with its vast potential, military and otherwise, takes action abroad in order to serve limited objectives, connected to its electoral campaign?" (Makram Mohamed Ahmed, 13 September)

Compiled by Hala Saqr



The joined eyebrows, resembling props from a horror film, proved the most convenient place to start when drawing Bob Dole, the Republican presidential candidate. The rounded cheeks, lips, chin and nose seem at odds with the pincer like hands. Though I tried to find some distinct aspect to Dole's visage, something unique to him, it proved impossible, and the end result is a hybrid portrait of a man who appears to be made from bits and pieces of former US presidents.

تَكَذَّبُ مِنَ الْأَصْلِ



## Close up

Salama A. Salama

## Why blind trust?

America's deliberate escalation of tensions in the Gulf has thrown the Middle East peace process into reverse, leading to the unavoidable conclusion that American policy is directed towards ends other than establishing stability and security in the region, or encouraging a suitable climate for the resumption of the peace process between Israel and the Arabs.

It is legitimate to ask whether links exist between Washington's determination to inflame the situation in the Gulf to the extent of resurrecting the possibility of another war with Iraq, the steady degradation of the peace process as Netanyahu makes it increasingly obvious that he will not honour agreements made with the Palestinians and American silence in the face of an Israel increasingly hostile to peace.

Many commentators have seen the latest Iraqi crisis as an attempt by the Clinton administration to secure electoral support at home. Certainly William Perry's frantic shuttling has had little success in persuading Gulf States that the threat constituted by Iraq is anything more than a figment of the American imagination, and US strikes against Iraq were censured in an Arab League Council meeting which also reaffirmed its support for Iraqi sovereignty over its own territory.

Certainly the kind of pressure the US applied to Arab states seems to have been geared towards widening differences and consequently negating the possibility of the Arabs adopting a unified stand against increasing Israeli belligerence towards peace, the root of the real crisis in the region that has resulted from the collapse of the peace process.

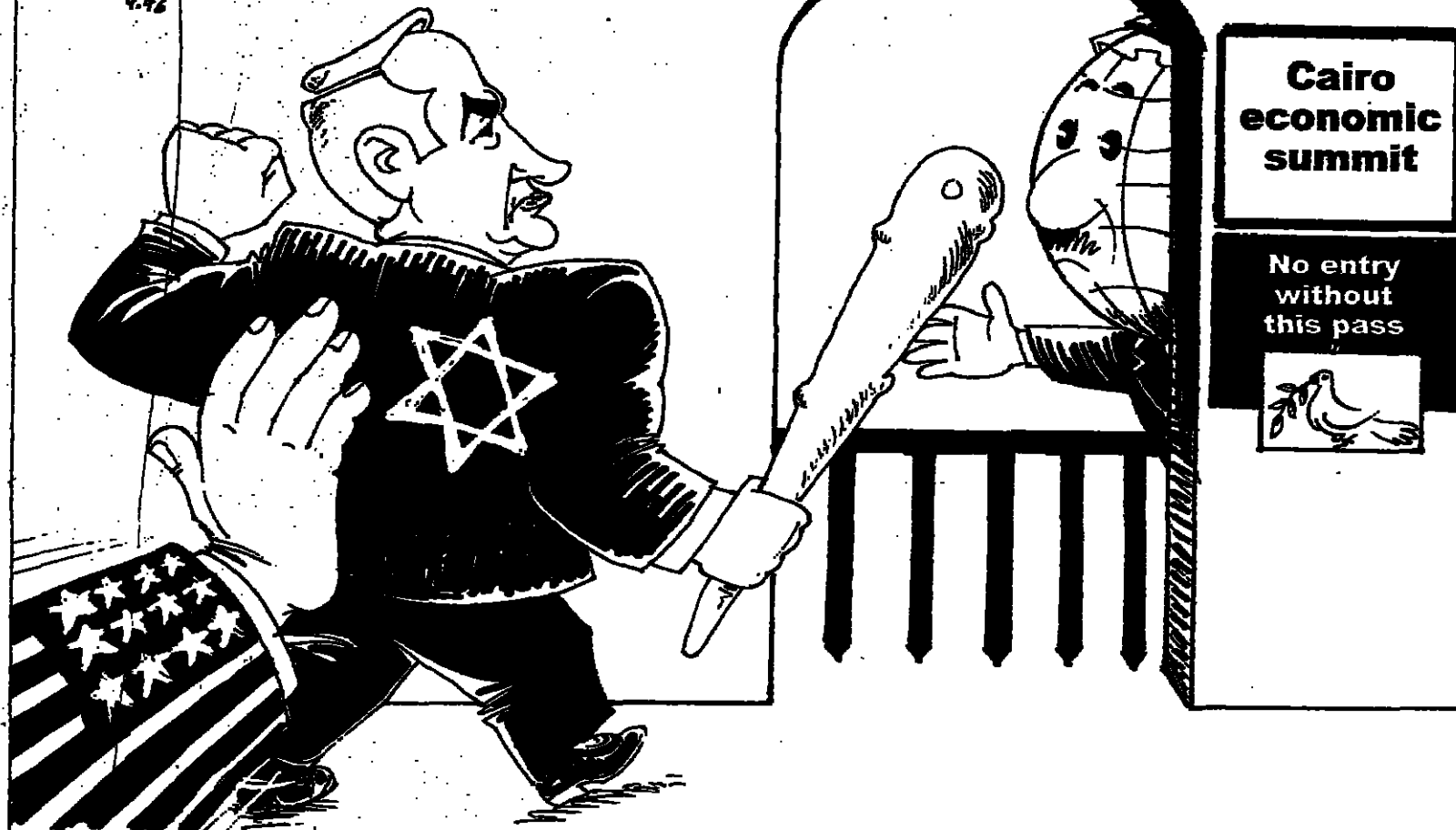
Netanyahu's government, after three months in power, has yet to face any US pressure to return to the peace process. Meanwhile, Egypt has been under intense pressure to convene the economic summit conference initially scheduled to be held in Cairo in November, regardless of the political climate or of whether the necessary preconditions for any meaningful conference exist.

Against this background the recommendations made by Arab foreign ministers with regard to Israeli stubbornness and American intransigence towards the peace process assume particular importance.

Were the Arab world to accept Israeli-American conditions it would find itself in a state of economic and political submission, unable to influence the spurious peace America has imposed on the region in favour of Israel. Nor is it at the moment, at all clear what Arab and Israeli delegations are expected to discuss at the projected economic summit. What, after all, can they discuss, in a climate close to war, and in the absence of any confidence in an Israeli government that has made it quite clear that it is happy to renege on agreements and commitments already made?

Perhaps the American government has an answer. If not, then Arab governments must come to their own conclusions, and work out just how they might fulfill their obligations to their own citizens should they decide to continue along the path of normalising relations with Israel in the absence of a volte face in the Israeli position.

Gomaa? 1996



## The Arabs' dual inspiration

Visionaries and betrayals: **Adel Sabet**, in the first part of a two-part article, looks back on fifty years of conflict, conspiracy and cooperation — and the making of the Arab League

The claim that the Arab League was the brainchild of British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden is absurd. It is true that Eden in 1942 came under pressure from a German threat to Syria and felt the need to reassure the Arabs as to the good intentions of his country. The idea of unity, however, had come much earlier. The League which emerged in fact represents a traditional continuity in Arab and Muslim political thinking since Mohamed Ali's grand scheme of the 1840s to reform the Ottoman Empire on an Arab and Turkish foundation. This means that the concept of an entity promoting Islamic and Arab unity can trace its roots back in history. The idea of reform and the promotion of unity has been a persistent and tenacious inspiration behind Arab and Muslim thinking over the last two centuries.

Examples of this were the proposals made by Aziz El-Masri Pasha to the British at the close of World War I. He proposed the formation of an Arab-Islamic commonwealth to replace the Ottoman Caliphate. Such an entity would be a decentralised and autonomous grouping of Arab and Muslim states, allied to the West. Its member states would meet in a joint centralised parliament whose task would be to coordinate policies of economics, defence and foreign affairs.

The proposal was ignored: the British had other plans. Lord Kitchener and his successors Sir Ronald Storrs, T. E. Lawrence, or Lawrence of Arabia, and Sir Marc Sykes had promoted the idea of an Arab kingdom, roughly along the lines suggested by the McMahon Agreement of 1916. It would have been headed by a Hashemite Caliph patronised by Britain — a patronage unacceptable to the Arabs. In any case, the idea clashed with the Jewish commitments of Winston Churchill and his prime minister, Lloyd George, who supported the Zionist cause and sought to find a home for the Jews in Palestine. This British government's withdrawal from its Arab promises was compounded by yet another defection from the McMahon commitment when Syria was assigned to France via the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Hashemite pretender was expelled.

These various betrayals were to prove costly to Britain during World War II, when no less than three Ottoman provinces, Libya, Syria and Iraq, were to become the bases for a German-Italian attack on Egypt, a Vichy French/German alliance threatening Palestine and the Suez Canal, and the Iraqi rebellion of Rashid Ali Al-Kilani. The price paid in men and material to restore the

status quo ante was a high one.

The Arabs, too, had to pay the price of the British defections. The Arab world was split up into separate entities and a process of Balkanisation was imposed on the Middle East.

The founding fathers of the Arab League — Nabhas Pasha, Abdel-Rahman Azzam, Shukri Al-Qurayshi, Gamal Mardam, Bichara Al-Khuri, Nuri Al-Said and Sheikh Youssef Yassin — were faced with a dilemma. How could they create a strong, unified Arab front from the Balkan chaos? Even within the Arab ranks, the Hashemite element was promoting an arrangement which would have eliminated Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The members of the Fertile Crescent plan would consist of the Hashemite strongholds, Jordan and Iraq, and would include Syria and Palestine. It was further suggested that a provisional status for Israel could be arranged. These proposals were included in the Blue Book arrangements offered by Nuri Al-Said Pasha of Iraq, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the Yemen and Lebanon were excluded, and were in any case not prepared to accept a Hashemite hegemony. Thus a mainline Arab/Muslim alignment found itself facing Hashemite-inspired separatism.

These were the problems facing the General Secretariat of Azzam Pasha. He realised that an organisation based on purely Arab lines would be difficult to manage. He therefore chose to appeal to Islamic solidarity, thus substituting the strong spiritual power of Islam for political loyalties to Arabism.

In any case, a symbiotic rapport existed between Arabism and Islam. Without Islam, Arabism would never have achieved its universal status; without the Arabs, Islam might have been stillborn. By cleverly playing on Muslim loyalties and invoking Muslim solidarity, Azzam Pasha was able to rally unanimous support for the recognition of Indonesia, and to form a completely unified Arab front on behalf of Libyan independence. The seven members of the Arab League threatened armed opposition to the Western attempt to carve the country up into three component parts, distributing them to various Western powers: Fezzan to France, Cyrenaica to Britain and Tripolitania to Italy. In separate negotiations in Alexandria with Italian Ambassador Count Fracassi and Count Strobel di Camposoglio, Azzam Pasha succeeded in securing Italy's vote for full unified Libyan independence.

In a candid moment, Azzam Pasha once said to me: "The Arab League is basically a Muslim League with an Arab label since all its members, including Lebanon, possess a Muslim majority." Azzam was a convinced Muslim. He intended *The Eternal Message of Mohamed* to be a blueprint of the ethics and outlook of the Arab League.

Why should Azzam have avoided emphasising the Muslim dimension? To bypass the odium of anti-Islamic prejudice which prevailed at the time in the West.

The Arab League which emerged was a regional organisation similar to the United Nations as far as its general forms were concerned. Its charter was drafted to meet the criteria of all its members and those of prejudiced foreign critics. Member states were fully entitled to disagree with majority decisions and votes carried no compulsions. The Islamic dimension was ignored.

Yet if anything, these were surface considerations, since the League was dedicated to Arab unification and the formation of an administrative infrastructure which would allow for the emergence of a federal union between its component parts. The traditional aims of union and reform still represented ideals to be pursued. A glance at the list of specialised agencies dependent on the League at the present time will show the degree of unification that is aimed at.

The great crisis in the League's history came with the Palestine war of 1948. The Arab League's General Assembly of 1946 had voted to face up to the need to defend the cause of the Palestinian people even if this might lead to open warfare. These decisions were given full publicity and the Arab threat of war was emphasised at the UN in 1947 by the combined Arab delegations. Azzam Pasha himself went to Washington, where he was able to fully brief the American secretary of state, General George Marshall, on the Arabs' determination to defend the rights of the Palestinians.

Deficient military intelligence on the Arab side unfortunately led the Arab states to expect little resistance from the poor "Jewish refugees". Anticipating a walk-over, they made no special preparations for war — to the detriment of Arab interests. This promoted general scepticism as to the seriousness of Arab threats and played into the hands of the Israelis. The UN made no special effort to prevent the outbreak of conflict.

With the withdrawal of the British Mandatory Authority from Palestine, the stage was set for war. Arab ar-

## Soapbox

## Cold war, new name

Neither peace nor war will break out overnight in the Middle East, a region that can be characterised as being in continuous crisis. And in such a situation the successful players will be those that minimise losses and maximise gains during each stage of the developing crisis, and that prove capable of being flexible in their assessment and willingness to play different roles.

There are many parties involved in the game but at the moment there are three obvious candidates for key-player status. These are the US, Israel and the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein. And from time to time each player reveals a few hidden cards in order to make additional gains.

Not that they are all playing with the same hand. Indeed, they each seek to wield different trump cards. The US plays superior military technology as its trump, Israel its possession of Arab lands while Iraq attempts to play with, and for, time.

In Washington the forthcoming presidential elections weigh heavily on the minds of policy makers intent on protecting oil reserves and making some headway in combating terrorism. Israel seeks to manipulate the just demands of the Palestinians, the clearly stated position of Syria and the fragile situation in Lebanon to its own advantage. Saddam Hussein, in the meantime, is seeking to use the Kurdish problem for his own ends.

Any analysis of this complicated, tripartite jockeying for position can come to only one conclusion — that Israel is the hands down winner. It, after all, controls Jerusalem, continues to Judaise Arab lands and is effectively in charge of the Palestinian economy.

Simply put, then, the state of continuous crisis which characterises the Middle East is simply a cold war with a new name. Yet despite the change of name the effects are the same, as the countries of the region expend all their energies in remaining in a state of continuous alert.



El-Sayed Elewa

This week's Soapbox speaker is professor of Political Science, Helwan University, and the president of Al-Qatar Consulting Centre.

## To The Editor

## Tribute to Bahaeddin

Sir, I'd like to pay tribute to our great intellectual and political thinker Ahmed Bahaeddin. Of course, this is not an eulogy because, as the dictum says "the great people never die".

His creativity and authentic works will immortalise him. His heritage will remain everlasting for our coming generations. He was a highly intelligent, sensitive writer and a nationalist who fiercely believed in Arab unity. He also believed in Egypt's potential to be a great country.

Bahaeddin's writings and political analyses depended on objectivity, wisdom, vigour and frankness. During his long tenure in the field of journalism — nearly 42 years, from 1948 to 1990 — he was committed to the principles of freedom, justice, and democracy. He was the conscience of his nation.

When Bahaeddin was once asked about the secret of his success in journalism, he replied, "I love journalism and man can reach the highest ranks by being faithful and devoted to his work".

One of the most wonderful projects established during his life was an intellectual cultural institution in London which carries his name. It aims at propagating his thoughts and opinions and his contributions to establish a comprehensive intellectual Arabic renaissance.

Ahmed Mohamed Sibry  
Postgraduate Studies  
Cairo University

## Clean air, please!

Sir, "Has the environment become the enemy of man or the reverse is right?" This question was recently raised, after scientists discovered that there is a correlation between air pollution and respiratory tract diseases. New findings have proven that polluted air in which the dust and smoke emitted by cement factories, spinning and weaving mills, and car exhausts can lead to asthma.

Laboratory experiments showed that air

molecules may precipitate on the internal tissues of the trachea and micro vessels in the human body. Consequently, the passage of air to the lungs is somewhat obstructed, bringing on asthma attacks and breathing difficulties.

The study also noted that the mortality rate could increase by an estimated 30 per cent as a result of related asthma respiratory diseases.

Fighting pollution in all its forms is the only recourse towards a healthy environment. The environment protection groups must play an effective role in curtailing this danger. We should seriously reconsider the constant violations of our sacred environment.

Asraf Faragallah Saad  
English Language Teacher  
Bent-Suef

## Abul-Ela Bridge — again

Sir, A lot of romantic nonsense has been written over the years about this bridge.

The facts remain that the French firm, Five Little, built the bridge which was opened to traffic in 1912, at a cost of about LE 300,000. It consists of four fixed sections of 50 metres each, with a mobile section in the middle of the river. Contrary to the legend, the bridge has neither technical nor mechanical problems, and for several months after being put into service, was opened for fluvial traffic — I possess photographs of the bridge in the open position. However, the piers supporting the bridge were not built parallel to the Nile current, and boats were liable to bump into the piers while passing under the bridge. It was, therefore, decided to stop operating the Abul-Ela bridge and divert Nile traffic to the Bahr El-Aama. I might add that when built, Abul-Ela Bridge was considered most aesthetic — how tastes can change!

A complementary bridge, inaugurated at the same time and known as the Zamalek Bridge was constructed on an artificial branch of the Nile (to be used as an over-

flow during the annual flood), now known as the Bahr El-Aama. Bahr El-Aama was dug in 1877 to surround the Khedivial Palace — now the Marriott Hotel — and its gardens — now the Gezira Sporting Club — thus forming an island in the Nile.

Finally, as a footnote, the designer of the bridge, Gustave Eiffel, the best known creator of metal constructions in the world, died peacefully at his home in Paris in 1923 at the ripe old age of 91. Needless to say, he did not commit suicide.

Dr Maged Mohamed Farag  
President, Max Group  
Cairo

## Unnecessary violence

Sir, I went to see the movie Casino last night and was disturbed by the confirmation of a trend I have noticed in the American movies I have seen in Cairo in the last 2-3 years. I have always been squeamish about violence as it is portrayed by Hollywood. I don't enjoy car chases and the inevitable bursting into flames of everything in their path, long drawn-out fights between the hero and some bad guy, people being murdered in their sleep or in the shower. However, I can deal with it, sometimes I can even refrain from closing my eyes during those crucial moments.

In the past I have been able to avoid the gruesome extremes of movie violence because these stayed confined to their own genre, horror films. What worries me, though, is that lately it seems that no mass audience movie is without some scene of torture. Consequently, such scenes are not as easily avoided as previously.

I can accept torture scenes as part of a script if the story is true, such as in *Braveheart* and *Casino*, but violence is definitely unnecessary in most fictional movies. For some reason these films feel compelled to have some scene of torture, perhaps to follow the trend?

Susan Monroe  
Bah El-Louk

## Forgotten odyssey

Sir, I have recently watched the film, *Nasser '56*. Superb! A step forward. However, I have something else to say. Our generation lived and interacted with the "War of Attrition", with veins pulsating from acts of heroism and sacrifice. Who forgot the torpedoing of the Israeli destroyer *Eilat*, and the victory notched up in the *Ras El-Esh* battle, only a few weeks after the 1967 setback? We should remember with pride the liberation of Shadwan island immediately after it was captured by Israel in 1970.

The Egyptian troops turned the canal front into "hell-fire round the clock," as a prominent Israeli figure put it at the time. Pushing Sam-6 missile defences forward to the canal front under fierce Israeli air bombing was another feat. Consequently, the number of the Israeli warplanes falling on the front was on the increase.

All these victories proved that the psychological warfare launched against the Egyptian people after the '67 setback came to naught. Since our new generations are not fully aware of all these brilliant pages in our past, it is time for TV producers to make a film recalling all or some chapters of the odyssey of the War of Attrition.

Mahmoud Elewa  
Victory College  
Maadi

## Good for Moussa

Sir, Although it goes against my best judgment, and even my sense of decency, to praise any official, particularly a senior one, I cannot help but writing to you to express my great admiration of Mr Amr Moussa, our Minister of Foreign Affairs.

But, as a matter of fact, I do not think of Mr Moussa as a state official, as much as I think of him as a symbol of patriotism.

Since he came to office, Moussa has made a great effort to underline Egypt's regional role as a peace broker and a peer, as opposed to a follower, of Israel. This in-

deed, has unleashed against him the fury of the Israeli media.

This, however, has failed to make him change his stance one bit of an inch. He has remained uncompromising about Egypt's regional weight and its solidarity with the rest of the Arab world.

Most impressive, I believe, was Moussa's recent reaction to the distasteful comment made by Binyamin Netanyahu about Egypt's hesitation to host the Middle East economic conference, due to the obvious Israeli intransigence regarding the peace process. Egyptians were furious to hear the Israeli prime minister smugly saying that Egypt would be cutting off its nose to spite its face, if it cancelled the conference. But Moussa saying, "Netanyahu should stay away from Egypt's nose, if he wants Egypt to stay off his nose," was a good hit back.

Indeed, it was very much applauded by many Egyptians who share my admiration of our foreign minister.

Yasmine Abdel-Rahman  
Heliopolis  
Cairo

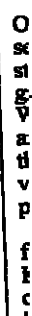
## US violations

Sir, Many countries condemned the US missile strike against Iraq as a violation of the sovereignty of an Arab state. It was an intervention in Iraq's internal affairs and showed that the US Administration has no respect for the UN charter on the sovereignty and independence of other countries because, actually, the Iraqi military operation in the north did not violate UN resolutions.

Moreover, not only does using military force without UN approval complicate the situation in the region, but it also adds to the sufferings of the Iraqi people. Any conflict should be resolved by legitimate negotiations, rather than using military force. We hope that no more bloodshed will take place.

Shazly Asmail Bahr  
Aswan





## Bahaa Taher remembers Latifa El-Zayyat, who died last week

But the therapy did not work, and when I went to the hospital I found a great number of women standing outside the door of the intensive care unit.

For those unfamiliar with the life of Latifa El-Zayyat there can be no better source than her autobiographical "Personal Papers", published in Arabic in 1992 by Dar El-Hilal in Cairo, and

In many ways the life of Latifa El-Zayyat is a struggle between these two symbols. The apricot tree blossomed whenever she managed to enter a circle, when the arm was extended or she was able to extend her own arm in welcome, while the well called, intimating always the great security of the void. And the call of the well proved at times too alluring, its promise of the silk co-

*Latifa El-Zayyat, b 1923, Damietta, d 10 September, 1996, Cairo. Writer, critic and political activist. Professor of English Literature, Ain Shams University. Chair of the Committee for the Defence of National Culture, arrested and imprisoned 1949 and 1981. Recipient of the State Merit Award for Literature, 1996.*

**Mohamed Nagui Museum**  
*Chateau Pyramide, 9 Mahmoud Al-Gundi St, Giza.*  
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956), the Alexandrian aristocrat who is considered one of the pioneers of the modern Egyptian art movement.

**Dr. Ya Gharasani**  
New York City, Tel. 262-9407. Daily  
8.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm &  
starting Laila Elwi, Ethnan  
and Hale Sedgi.

**Churches in**  
**Jerusalem:**  
St. 65 Abdel-Hamid Badewy St.  
Tel. 293 1072. Daily  
6.30pm & 9.30pm; Thurs mid-  
night. MGM, Maadi Grand  
Theatrical El-Nasr Sq. Maadi. Tel  
293 1072. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm

**Pharmacies in**  
French Cultural Center,  
Anwar, 27 Sawt Al  
Sq. Heliopolis. Tel.  
630pm.  
Lecture by M. Strou-  
turel Attaché in C

**Medicine**  
French Cultural Cen-  
ter, Matruhet El-  
Sq., Moubarak. Tel.

Centre, Heliopolis  
in Alton St. Emanuel  
417 4824. 19 Sep.  
arna, Romanian Cal-  
o.  
ntre, Monna An-  
oung El-Firiney  
54 7679. 25 Sep.

## David Blake misses notes beneath the hollyhocks

*Anas El-Wagood* is a useful

in *D* major. Schumann was found during the performance but eventually lost. By the end he had disappeared. Brahms

accounts for its appeal. It is bad classical music, lacking all the things that make Schumann great, and veers too close to the heavy pud-

Dina Ellesi, a student at the

This serenade is in six mov

jokes. It may be the listener who is lost. But the music's grey eminence of *Vienna* holds the key.

**Ahmed Amin Assem**

\_\_\_\_\_

*Reviewed by Nagwa El-*

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to criteria

## AMERICAN JOURNAL OF ANATOMY

**N**EW museums are always a welcome addition to the Egyptian cultural scene. The Nasser Museum of Modern Art, Port Said, is one such addition. Works on exhibition include engravings by Fathi Ahmed and Ezzat Shethata, paintings by Abdel-Hadi El-Gezzer, Ahmed Nawar, Mustafa Mahdi, Fatma El-Arangi and Ahmed Nabli Soliman and a sculpture by Ahmed Amin Assem.

The Opera House Round Gallery shows paintings by Ahmed Abdou, Mohamed Fakhry Naguib, Scarpes and architecture from Nubia and Assuan as their subject; these are attentive to detail and judicious in their balancing of colour.

**Reviewed by Nagwa El-Asri**

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While the members of the American Museum to Sherman of the their final session in the gallery of Al-Hamra Hotel. What the critics were surprised to find was that the agreement of the generally modest and frugal people of the country was not a condition of the U.S. and British year with a period of spending the first half of the year on the matter to the next year.

The meeting, however, all because of a small crime of the old vociferously they should adopt a pact.

**The Colar and the "For years,"** the argument was enough to back away concluded.

When gently reminding in question felt should be a subsidiary of the majority vote was demanded that we immediately reminded.

British of the "this different plane with seemed to be a few believed to have a few returning to the venerable past that we was it was reasonably winning both our submitted, it was un- of artistic potential folklore (far too me- Egypt with a sub- terms of innovative- ily or technical virtu- 19thm Man, Singa- Admiral or Austria- the five allotted aw- the staunch patriot of **The Colar** W- rector, Nasser Ad- cate of merit, aw- nounced as un- really had in mind- tronically, as fate- was vindicated, as the multi-national, Egypt the much com- ran of the awards- missed ears. forward- jury had called the morale of the South Africa scop- got the best actor- maintaining award for- nography award for- mina Burana either- the rest of the awa- nce for a shorter, un- for one, do not sit- solve, objective st- to criteria which a- and political circum-



سكز لمن الإهل



**The Cairo International Festival For Experimental Theatre is over for another year. And if anything, the announcement of the results of the competition at last Wednesday's closing ceremony aroused more controversy than ever. Nehad Selaha rounds up the highs and lows of this year's event.**



The lucky winners, recipients of awards that provoked gasps of surprise from the panel of Egyptian critics who this year, as in the past, met to judge their own prizes and, after a sometimes heated meeting, produced a list quite different from that of the competition's international jury

# Staging a brouhaha

While the members of the international jury, headed by the American Martha Coigney, were closeted at the Cairo Sheraton on the eve of the closing ceremony to sift out their final verdict, the panel of Egyptian critics met at the gallery of Al-Hanager Centre, by courtesy of its director, Hoda Warfi, to consider their parallel awards. The nine critics who bothered to show up were all more or less in agreement about the productions worth considering. The generally modest artistic standard of many of the visiting troupes this year and the regrettable absence of such likely candidates as India, Japan, Venezuela, France, the UK, the US and Bulgaria — who took Cairo by storm one year with a production called *Don Juan* — made the task of spotting the truly outstanding shows easy and left very little room for difference of opinion. One expected the matter to be settled in less than half an hour.

The meeting, however, lasted for two heated hours, and all because of patriotism. It reared its dubious head when one critic of the old guard, soon joined by another, started vociferously arguing that, as Egyptians and Arabs, we should adopt a patriotic stand and opt for the Egyptian *The Collar* and the *Bracelet* as best production. "For years," he argued, "we have not had a show decent enough to back without blushing. Now is our chance," he concluded. When gently reminded that, good as it may be, the play in question fell short of the technical brilliance and imaginative subtlety of the Polish *Carmina Burana*, for which the majority vote went, he roundly told us that patriotism demanded that we support the local product. I was immediately reminded of the slogan, much bandied in the Britain of the '60s, "Buy British", and was jolted onto a different plane where things like cars, fridges and cookers seemed to be the items under consideration. I was relieved to hear a female colleague passionately objecting to the venerable patriot's mercantile metaphor and acidly retorting that we were not out shopping. In our situation, it was reasonably argued, true patriotism lay in maintaining both our integrity and credibility as critics. Admittedly, it was unanimously agreed, *The Collar* had a lot of artistic potential and effectively harnessed a lot of folklore (far too much, and far too mixed up for some people's taste) to construct its own view of life in Upper Egypt with a substantial degree of authenticity; but in terms of innovative daring, research, structural complexity or technical virtuosity and polish, it could not measure up to Poland's *Carmina Burana*, Switzerland's *The 18mm Man*, Singapore's *The Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral* or Austria's *Time Sailors*. As we went through the five allotted awards, discussing the various nominees, the staunch patriot kept heckling and giggling in favour of *The Collar*. When it was finally agreed that its director, Nasser Abdel-Moneim, be given a special certificate of merit, away from the awards, he bitterly denounced us as unfair — traitors was perhaps what he really had in mind — and left in a huff. Ironically, as fate would have it, his "patriotic" policy was vindicated the very next day and by none other than the multi-national, international jury. *The Collar* won Egypt's much coveted award for best direction, and, best of the awards, as they tumbled on our baffled, bemused ears, forced us to conclude that this year the official jury had really gone overboard in its zeal to boost the morale of the Arabs and Africans. Apart from Egypt, South Africa scooped the best production award, Tunisia got the best actor and Palestine best actress. The remaining award for best technical presentation — a scenery award — went to the Polish *Carmina Burana* either, one surmises, to give credibility to the rest of the awards, or because Poland is one of Europe's poorest, underprivileged states.

I, for one, do not subscribe to the belief that there are absolute, objective standards of excellence, nor do I object to criteria which take into consideration socio-economic and political circumstances or questions of cultural specificity and difference. The truth, after all, cannot exist in a vacuum and as the British writer and critic Anthony Everitt once said to me, "there are many excellences". Such criteria, however, if applied, should be made public, and, paradoxically, if they are, they make a mockery of any theatrical contest, particularly when the theatre in question is experimental — which is, by definition, tentative, exploratory, rebellious, rule-defying, anti-establishment and largely indefinable. Moreover, rewarding prizes on such a basis is doubly unfair: not only is it unfair for the countries and troupes presenting hard earned quality productions, it is also demeaning to those who are given prizes as if out of pity for their underprivileged status or because they are the conventional underdogs of the international scene. I have long clamoured for the abolition of the competition, and in 1991 a member of the festival's jury, American director Laura Farabaugh, put the case quite clearly and succinctly in a report sent to the minister of culture, Farouk Hosni, and the festival's director, Fawzi Fahmi. The relevant bits of her report, a copy of which she sent to me, appeared on this page that same year and were recently quoted in an overview of CIFET published in the monthly magazine, *Egypt Today*. The competition, however, is still with us and until such time as it gracefully bows out, the majority of Egyptian critics can be found striving to redress the balance by putting theatre before politics, creed or country.

At the end of the first part of the closing ceremony, after all the awards had been announced and presented, an amusing incident occurred: a keen TV interviewer shoved a microphone in my face and briskly demanded why the international jury had given Egypt an award and the Egyptian critics had not. I looked at her quizzically and asked: "Do you really want an honest answer?" She was taken aback, and when it suddenly dawned on her what I meant and was about to say she got thoroughly flustered and hastily backed down. Other incidents during the awards presentation ceremony were not so amusing. This year the head of the jury, Martha Coigney, chose to introduce a new practice, mentioning the names of all the nominees for each award before announcing the lucky winner. Given the language barrier — only Arabic and English were used — and the general atmosphere of feverish excitement and anticipation, this created incredible confusion and embarrassment and resulted in a tumultuous raising and dashing of false hopes. The most notorious moment occurred when the lead actor of Tatarstan's version of Moliere's *Les Fourberies de Scapin*, upon hearing his name read among the nominees for best actor, rushed up on stage with a proud, springy step, bursting with smiles and cheered on by his fellow actors. The jury head and the master of ceremonies, TV announcer Ibrahim El-Kurdani, were utterly dismayed and gave him the sort of welcome normally reserved for alien mutants or else to criminally insane. He was shoofed rudely off the stage. Bloody, and unbowed, he put a brave face on things, shrugged and grinned at the audience and was rewarded with a huge round of applause. When the time came for the five Singapore actors to collect the critics' award for acting, given to them collectively for their highly disciplined, realistic and spiritually charged performance in *The Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral*, we discovered that the festival's ushers, ignorant of the critics' awards, had given them seats high up in the gallery of the main hall at the Opera, where the ceremony took place. It takes a few minutes to race down from the gallery, or even the dress circle to the stalls and the gap was filled with a lot of frantic waving and hallooing from the audience to the effect that the Singaporeans were there and on their way down. When one of them finally made it to the stage, the master of ceremonies had already moved on to the next critic's award and introduced him as the representative of Austria's *Time Sailors*, which won best technical presentation. The audience, however, many of whom had seen and loved the Singaporean show, and become familiar with the actors who zealously attended most of the festival's performances, soon corrected this error with a resounding shout of "Singapore, Singapore". It was a warm, spontaneous tribute to a truly daring, deeply funny, well-researched and poetically riveting production.

Playwright Kuo Pao Kun, who is a prolific dramatist, director, teacher and founder of many theatre projects in Singapore, voyaged through Chinese history and came back with the figure of the Grand Eunuch and master mariner Zhenghe (1371-1433), a Muslim of Mongol-Arab origin, captured and castrated by the Chinese for service in the imperial court. He later assumed an important political role and led seven naval expeditions that blazed the sea route from China to the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea and beyond and asserted Chinese authority in the southern sea. In the hands of Kuo Pao Kun, however, this ancient hero becomes a rich symbol for spiritual impotence, loneliness and alienation, the divided self and the ceaseless thirst and search for wholeness and completion. The castration metaphor generates and permeates the string of monologues and incantatory exchanges that make up the spoken text, and these are occasionally interspersed with grotesque, lurid descriptions of the various methods and techniques of castration and with the image of a large room full of cut-off male organs suspended from the ceiling at different heights to denote their owners' political status. In handling this daring, deeply evocative and intensely lyrical text, director Ong Keng Sen opted for a mixture of ritualistic movement, incantatory vocal delivery, mystical ardour and some harsh, soulless images of modernity, such as the video projection of a computer screen showing readouts of stock market figures which filled the whole stage at times, reducing the actors to shadows. The rhythm was generally hypnotic despite some small changes in mood and tempo and it was signalled at the beginning by the rising of the two actresses and actors, in modern business suits, from their seats in the auditorium and their slow progression towards the stage like sleep-walkers. When the hypnotic rhythm of the speech and movement clashed with the cruelly vivid imagery of castration and the bombastic reports of the admiral's heroic exploits the effect was simply chilling. We laughed, but it was hollow, nervous laughter — the defensive, ashamed laughter of someone reliving an old, harrowing nightmare vividly recounted anew but now at a sufficiently safe distance.

The Swiss *18mm Man*, by the Carambole Dance and Theatre Company, was equally entrancing and mesmerising, but in a very different vein. Here the poetry of communication, rather than of alienation, was the moving spirit and it informed the complex, intricately orchestrated choreography of this mime, movement and dance piece. Inspired by Abe Kobo's novel *The Woman in the Dunes*, in which an entomologist is trapped by a

woman in a huge sand pit, the performance managed to transform the pit into a metaphor for life and the sand into a symbol of time — at once relentless in its flow and constant auction, fugitive in its moments. Director Gabor Goda exercised great austerity and self control in his choice of the material for his composition. The set, in terms of colour and movement composition depended on a few eloquent movement sequences which were juggled together, broken, exchanged, repeated with variations or replayed at a different tempo. The show reminded me of many of the stories I had read as a child, particularly *Alice in Wonderland* with its shrinking doors and outrageously out-sized creatures. But besides the children's book magical appeal, the *18mm Man* managed to body forth and communicate, in a stunningly subtle way, a lot of grown up sorrow and existential yearnings. In comparison, the Austrian Tanz Hotel Company's *Time Sailors* was sunny, cheerful and unreservedly optimistic. Instead of an endless stream of fugitive grains of sand, time here appeared as a sea — treacherous, turbulent and endless, but at least continuous and ever-present. The energy and ebullience of the all male dancers, the startling shifts in lighting, movement and rhythm, the fresh and humorous use of props, and the aggressive, invigorating sound-track which accompanied the show, not to mention the moments of tenderness and human solidarity, made *Time Sailors* an unforgettable experience and a true celebration of life that cocks a snook at death and time.

The South African *Blues Train*, which I had earlier enjoyed watching, never thinking, however, that it could walk away with the jury's best production award, engaged the second part of the closing ceremony. The four black performers were in top form, but since the performance requires a modicum of knowledge of English and of the political history of South Africa to achieve its full comic and satirical impact, a large chunk of the audience were left wondering why this high-spirited, fast moving political skit on life in South Africa after apartheid won the jury's unconditional favour. But apart from the awards and the really classy shows some of the best enjoyment I got out of this festival came from the most disastrous, insipid and pretentious productions. I stoically sat through Belarus's *I Wanna Be Loved by You* simply because I love Marilyn Monroe and anything that reminds me of her. Half way through I was sickened by the shallowness of the treatment and the laboured sentimentality and decided to leave. It was then that I was rewarded for my patience with the priceless sight of the male actor — a stocky, ferocious looking man impersonating all the oppressor's of Monroe's life, including President Kennedy and the American system — holding a thermos flask over the supine figure of the actress playing Monroe and squirting a thin stream of liquid between her legs. Nothing I had ever seen on stage could match it in obscenity or crass, vulgar prudery. He was greeted with jeers, hoots and mocking applause and from then on it was fun all the way, thanks to the audience's robust contribution. Another unfortunate incident occurred at the Ukrainian production of *Iago*, when the corpse of Desdemona was dropped into the pool of the Forte Grand Hotel, where the performance was staged, by a cast who obviously had no idea that the same pool had recently been the scene of a tragic accident that had cost the life of a child. It received massive press coverage at the time and no one in the audience could help wondering if the Forte Grand management had been told beforehand of the number of deaths involved in the production around their pool side, or of the number of corpses that would be floating in it.

**'Nothing I had ever seen on stage could match it in obscenity or crass, vulgar prudery. He was greeted with jeers, hoots and mocking applause and from then on it was fun all the way, thanks to the audience's robust contribution'**

## Plain Talk

One of the features I like most about magazines published in England is the way they provide the readers with sporadic overviews of the cultural scene. And in Britain September, particularly, seems an ideal month for such a broad brush approach since it coincides with both the end of the Edinburgh Festival and the Promenade Concerts.

The *Sunday Times* Culture section has some interesting figures and facts about what they term "culture vultures", an analysis of cultural activities and the type of people who attend or participate in them. It is clear that the breadth of activities in England offers people a banquet with forms varying from classical music, opera and ballet, art exhibitions, to pop culture and cinema.

The magazine classifies culture vultures into three categories: the cultured, the keen and the casual. According to its figures, 80 per cent of the adult population take part in one kind of cultural event or another. The cinema gets the highest share, with 45 per cent, followed by visiting stately homes, with 37 per cent. Art, theatre, classical music, ballet, jazz, and contemporary dance score 37 per cent, with an aggregate number of 17 million people.

Classical art forms are at the top of the pyramid, while mass entertainment is at the bottom. Unfortunately, the former events give way to what Robert Hewison of the *Sunday Times* calls a "super-market of styles where people pick and mix their cultural pleasures". He deplores the culture of consumption, where hot dogs are served at the Tate Gallery and where people spend more time at museum cafeterias than contemplating the objects on display.

The paper tries to divide the vultures according to class, asking whether there is an elite audience for high brow manifestations. Visitors to the Tate Gallery are 95 per cent middle and upper-middle class, but on the other hand, the friends of the Royal Academy also belong to the same classes. The findings show that the most cultured audiences are those that attend the Promenade Concerts, where 80 per cent of the seats are always sold. Age-wise, pop and movies claim the young, museums the 30-somethings, while classical music, opera and ballet are for those above 40. Such are the interesting facts and figures which act as pointers to what can be called the moving target of shifting tastes.

September also marks the beginning of the new books season. According to the *Independent Week End*, biographies are strongly present this autumn. One book which is apt to sell like hot cakes is the biography of Lawrence Olivier by Roger Lewis. With the by now pronounced tendency towards voyeurism, the British public is yearning to read about the hidden aspects of their great actor's life. Already extracts have been published and have caused quite a stir.

Other subjects of biographies include Picasso, Samuel Beckett, Virginia Woolf, Christopher Isherwood and Alec Guinness, to mention but a few. What really surprises me in this literary area is the fact that some personalities have more than one biography to their name, and the various texts can often contradict one another. Virginia Woolf, for instance, is the subject of a new biography by Hermione Lee, though Quentin Bell's exhaustive biography of Woolf appeared as recently as 1972.

Fiction also enjoys a considerable share of the book market, with new novels by Muriel Spark, Margaret Atwood, Colm Toibin, Clive James and others. Talking about novels, *The Victims Circle*, by Amanda Craig, was withdrawn by its publishers as a result of objections made by certain critics. The novel deals with what critics call "the back stabbing in the world of book launches and literary pages". Probably the novel struck too close to home. There are, after all, few characters so vain as fictional characters and everyone is inclined to see portraits of themselves in the work of people they know. A novel set in literary circles, a very small and enclosed world, could easily prove too hot to handle and, worrying about future critics' reviews, the publisher suddenly developed cold feet. Quite a reminder of the case of D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, except that this time it is not the state that censored, but the publisher.

Mursi Saad El-Din







# An Alexandrian anthology

For the non-Egyptian reader, the poetics of Alexandria have been formulated by British novelist Lawrence Durrell's *Quartet* and the poetry of Egyptian Greek Constantine P. Cavafy — the widely divergent provenance of their respective visions of the city notwithstanding. While there is a body of Egyptian fiction on Alexandria — by Edward El-Kharat, Ibrahim Abdel-Meguid and Naguib Mahfouz among others — it is only quite recently that some of these texts about or set in the city have become available in translation. But the trend has not reached Egyptian poetry on Alexandria, mostly scattered in the collections of various poets. Hence this miniature "Alexandrian anthology".

Of the poets translated below, the only Alexandrian is Bairam El-Tunsi (1893 - 1961). The pillar of colloquial poetry, El-Tunsi's work often carried acerbic political and social satire (his lampoon against Queen Nefza landed him in exile for long years). El-Tunsi was also a prolific lyric writer who collaborated with Alexandrian singer Sayed Darwish (1892 - 1923). Working within the mode set by El-Tunsi, it is not surprising to find Ahmed Fouad Nigm (b. 1930) giving his mentor pride of place among the icons of "Egyptian Alexandria" he invokes in the poem translated below. These include Abdullah El-Nadim (1845? - 1896), Alexandrian poet, journalist and bard of the Urabi uprising.

Ahmed Abdel-Moeti Hegazi (b. 1935), one of the pioneers of free verse in Egypt, often reveals in his poetry a concern for the urban-rural dichotomy which for him parallels that of innocence versus experience. Amal Donqol (1940 - 1983), drawing on Arab mythology, gave voice to the marginal, and was a sort of *poète maudit*. Of the same generation, Mohamed Ibrahim Abu Sinna (b. 1937) writes within the romantic tradition.

## The Municipal Council

My heart is woe-begone for the love  
of one by the name of the Municipal Council  
None other kept my swollen eyes open by night but the  
ethereal shadow of the Municipal Council  
Whenever I get bread, half the loaf I eat  
and half I leave to the Municipal Council  
And whenever I sit I watch my pocket  
for fear of thieves and of the Municipal Council  
Never do I clothe my children, be it in winter or  
summer, unless I do the same for the Municipal Council  
As if my mother — may her grave be always verdant —  
had said in her parting words: Be a brother to the Municipal Council  
I dread marriage, for fear that on my wedding day  
my bride should be taken by my friend, the Municipal Council  
And that if the Almighty granted me a son in her womb,  
he should be claimed by the Municipal Council  
O radish vendor, you who sell at a millime spice,  
how much goes to your children, how much to the Municipal Council?

Bairam El-Tunsi

## O Alexandria

O Alexandria, your sea is all marvels  
Would that I had a share of love.  
A wave flings me  
On the chest of a wave  
And the sea is all turbulence,  
The cargo abundant.

I wash my clothes  
And hang my worries  
Upon a rising sun  
In which I dissolve.  
As if I am a peasant from Urabi's army  
Who died defending a fort  
And was washed away by your sea.

As if I am a breeze blown in from the sea  
Over the dunes to drown in your allure  
As if a word from the mind of Bairam  
As if a song from the heart of Sayed  
As if a student who chanted your name  
In a demonstration and died rejoicing.

As if I am El-Nadim's voice in your night  
Awakening people  
To give you force  
As if a stone from a house in one of your alleys  
As if a tear in sleepless eyes  
As if a star atop the lighthouse  
Guiding the wanderers  
In the absence of the moon.

O Alexandria,  
Egyptian Alexandria...  
The sea is a latticed window.  
And you, behind it, a princess  
Gazing out upon the world.

Ahmed Fouad Nigm

Alexander the Great knew —  
Despite the conquests — that cities  
Are like women, who elude their lovers,  
And endure little,  
Save their yearning for the awaited, imminent one.

He knew that fate  
Shuffled his cards in the hands of danger,  
One time rendering his enemies triumphant,  
Another electing him for victory,  
Aware that wishes are but images  
Wrought by a dreamer in the moonlight,  
Only for the sun to scorch one day,  
The rain erasing whatever is left,  
Knew that the mountains he climbed  
Would drop to a precipice,  
That happiness, like the ways of women,  
Would lead him only to vexation,  
Knew that the horse  
He bestrode was loyal  
In a way men cannot be.  
But he has now fallen into the battle of fate,  
And the eyes of the victims  
Signal to him to take his life  
And the land that bowed to him  
Now, in the rancour of defeat,  
Evokes portents.  
What is Alexander to do, now,  
As death watches him,  
In the midst of this perilous perfection?

What does he seek?  
The kingdoms kneel awaiting his every command.  
There is India unravelling her wisdom  
Before his eyes.  
Persia desires him.  
What does he seek?  
Wise man or fool is he?  
Apprehensions fill him and misery singles him out.  
What does he seek?

He is waiting for the sign.  
He knows that the emptiness that envelops him  
Is murderous, that the lands that beseeched him  
Now wish him dead  
That time, hateful time,  
Pursues him,  
Relentlessly, with the question that  
Goads his very soul  
What has died in him?  
What has died in him?  
He has set out all alone  
Wandering without aim  
Knowing full well that all you buy  
Sells you, cheaper.  
Then you would have thought,  
That what you possessed now possesses you.

What does he seek?  
What does he seek?

The sea looms through the fog,  
Bearing the glad tidings.  
"Soldiers  
These are the gardens of my soul  
And this my mighty will  
Now giving birth from the rubble  
To an immortal twin,  
So raise my heart upon these shores  
Make of it a metropolis of civilisation.  
Here my soul will rest  
Here will a lighthouse stand."

Here is Alexandria, an enigma  
Successive eras have not deciphered.  
In ancient times she wedded the sea  
And lived out  
A dance of singular measure  
Amid its murmur.  
Whenever the sea wears its  
He comes to visit her:  
A warm body in his bed.

Mohamed Ibrahim Abu Sinna

## Alexandria

## A Seaside Holiday

August  
Alexandria  
Iodine permeating lungs  
Clogged by asthma and dust.

The prime of May ages  
And in the morning, in surrender, we raise out white flag to the sea  
For the salt to corrode us  
And impart to our complexions leprous freckles.  
We spread the midday rugs to sit on the sand,  
Fan our obscure, sensual sadness so it glows  
(When we made to touch it, it scorched our hands),  
Feel virginity's breast — how could its freshness wither,  
Secreting poison and worms that teem in a rotten apple?

At night, we pull down our flag  
And breach the eternal truce,  
Daring to ask: "Are we dead?"  
Our roving through the town's night-life,  
Our rocking in the tram,  
Our cuddling in darkened doorways,  
The flutter of glances from shop windows to graceful women walking past  
The horse-drawn carriage conveying us unhurriedly  
The laughter, the jibes:  
Remnants of bitter foam, ephemeral froth?  
"Say, are we dead?"  
We sink our teeth into weary migrant birds.

2

My friend who plunged into the sea died  
So I mummified him  
(And kept his teeth:  
Every daybreak I take one  
And cast it at the sun's comely countenance,  
Reiterating: "O Sun, I give you his pearly tooth  
It is untainted... save for the scent of hunger.  
Bring him back, bring him back, so that he gives us sound wisdom."  
Alas, it smiled a wan smile!)

And on the seashore was a sad flag and a rage of wind  
And we — in silence — carried his body over our shoulders  
Then descended the city streets,  
Stopping passersby  
Asking about the way to the cemeteries, and the failed journey!  
But in the end  
We returned to the seashore and the raging flag.

\*\*\*

The sea was our beginning —  
when we set out for the cemeteries! —  
How was it we returned to it,  
And how did we mistake the way?  
Amal Donqol

## Alexandria Diary

A dark cloud fills the sky  
But for a dusky ribbon that separates it from the darkness of the houses  
And the sea is colours that die as the evening closes in  
While we in the caft die.

2

Marie whom I rescued from a policeman  
Two nights ago  
I saw walking at night, alone, on the beach  
Offering her Athenian breasts for two liras  
And when we'd hurried across the road,  
The door slammed shut and firmly bolted,  
She told me the story of the young man who rescued her  
Two nights ago  
Then cried, and smiled,  
While the faint moonlight filled the windows.

3

It was a pallid farewell —  
Our farewell at the end of summer, at the end of the day,  
A silent farewell  
On the Corniche, the horizon behind us a void,  
As if we were protagonists in a play with no setting  
That starts without a cue  
And ends without a curtain.

4

The cities I have crossed in times long gone, in my brief childhood,  
The ships that light up in the distance then fade away,  
The mellow verse from a popular song —  
That flows from a nearby wedding,  
My loneliness on a night when I despaired of meeting friends —  
All that provokes in me a crying fit  
And when at the end of the outburst I awake, the tears do not come:  
Such is the anguish of my last journey.

Ahmed Abdel-Moeti Hegazi



# Abu Sefein's: a treasure trove of icons

Abu Sefein Church in Old Cairo welcomes you to the largest Coptic art museum in Egypt, and with no entry fee, as Sherine Nasr found out

Tourist itineraries to the Coptic churches often overlook one of the most ancient and perhaps most beautiful churches in Cairo, Abu Sefein's. Built in the 5th century, Abu Sefein's is surrounded by a complex of other ancient churches and a monastery dating back to the same era. It stands only one kilometer from the famous Hanging Church.

"If the Hanging Church has always been known for its unique frescoes, Abu Sefein's certainly excels in icons and wood works," said Father Saleeb, one of the church's two priests.

While there are 110 icons in the Hanging Church, Abu Sefein's contains more than 250 of the best and most well-preserved icons in Egypt, if not the whole world, according to Emad Malak, an icon restorer at the church.

A visitor to the church will certainly be amazed by the great number of icons in variable sizes and substances. That these icons, most of which belong to the 13th century, have maintained their original, bright colours is even more amazing, considering its history. "Incredibly, the church was used as a sugar cane store house for three centuries before it was completely rebuilt in the 10th century," said Saleeb.

Almost all the icons were painted by Ibrahim El-Nasikh and John the Armenian, two of the most famous iconographers of the 13th and 14th centuries. Between them, they produced the largest number of icons of the era, according to Abu Sefein's icon restorers.

You do not have to be an art critic to appreciate these works of art, nor do you have to be familiar with the history of the church to fully understand them. Many of these icons have Coptic and Arabic writings indicating the saint's name and history, and the icon's painter. Others have the saint's life history recorded in small scenes surrounding his or her picture.

Huge icons of the Archangels decorating both sides of the three entrances of Abu Sefein's, are the first things that meet the visitor as he enters. "It is symbolic of their protection of the church," Father Saleeb explained.

To the right of the entrance, lies a medium-size ante-room which contains three icons: St Barsoum, St Demiana and the Prophet Elijah. They are all placed in an ancient and beautifully decorated wooden frame of dark green and golden rays. "The icon of Elijah is unique as the first to portray the prophet's profile," Malak said.

The icons in the church fall into several different categories. Some, such as the one depicting Julius El-Aqfahsi (writer of the martyrs' biographies), refer to historical figures. It shows him holding an open book which includes the names of the martyrs whose histories he recorded. Others depict religious events such as the Baptism, showing Christ fully submerged in the River Jordan.

Still other icons portray unique topics

which have rarely been drawn, like the newly restored icon representing 24 priests holding gold incense burners, a scene from the Book of Revelations. Some common topics are portrayed in an unfamiliar manner. For instance, an icon depicting the Resurrection has Christ holding the hands of Adam and Eve while a group of characters from the Old Testament stand behind them.

"The Supreme Council of Antiquities has realised the importance of these Coptic treasures, and has agreed to restore all the icons in the church," said Father Saleeb.

A complete restoration of the icons and woodworks began two years ago, in cooperation with the Dutch Institute for Archaeology. The task was assigned to Suzanna Skalova, one of the most famous professional icon restorers. She has carried out similar projects in other churches. "We have already restored 10 out of the 250 icons. They are considered among the most important in the church," said Mervat Rizk, another icon restorer who received her training from the US Library of Congress. One of these is a huge icon of Abu Sefein standing, not riding a horse as he is traditionally portrayed.

The restorers carry out their task in one of the two chapels on the second floor of Abu Sefein's.

The project has no deadline. "Each icon is unique and, therefore, we cannot tell for sure when the project will be finished," said Malak.

The restoration includes not only cleaning the icon but also polishing it to make it look brighter. "We do not add an extra layer of colour to the original, but we fill in any holes in the icon," he said.

Nothing outshines the beauty of the icons except the precious iconostas at the entrance to the altar. It is among the oldest in Egypt.

"The iconostas is a priceless masterpiece," said Saleeb. Made of rare wood, it is decorated with awe-inspiring, hand-made engravings which sit on ivory crosses and vine leaves. "It is the only iconostas in Egypt that displays a three-dimensional engraving on ivory," said Saleeb, who added that ivory can only be carved when pliable. "This means that this great work of art had to be created immediately after pulling the tusks out of a large number of elephants. Otherwise, the ivory would become fragile and unworkable," he said.

Behind the iconostas hides the most spacious sanctuary in Coptic Cairo. This area is no less decorative than the rest of the church. It contains many wooden icons adorning the areas in and outside the dome above the altar. A niche at the far end of the sanctuary houses a scene of glorious beauty where semi-circular stairs, ornamented with beige, burgundy and brown strips of marble, rise seven steps above the ground, leading to the patriarch's seat in the middle. "The steps are symbolic of



The icon of Archangel Gabriel is one of the most ancient and well-preserved in the church

photo: Sherif Sonbol

the church hierarchy," explained Saleeb. "This is where patriarchs were ordained for three centuries, beginning in the 10th century," he added.

The church also counts among its treasures a large number of relics depicting saints, Egyptians and foreigners. "These are genuine relics. They are mentioned in ancient manuscripts dating back to the time the church was rebuilt," he said.

The two second-floor chapels, dedicated to John the Baptist and St George, house the only frescoes in the whole ancient structure. "The frescoes were discovered in 1988 and go back to the 10th century," said Saleeb. The frescoes, in-

cluding some portraying the birth of Christ and the Virgin Mary, cover the entire sanctuaries of both churches. "One of these frescoes has been polished to the point where more than 40 saints can be identified," he said.

According to Saleeb, it is possible that the main church once contained a great number of frescoes which were destroyed by humidity. "Frescoes on the second floor had a better chance to survive," he said.

The second floor also provides an excellent view of the main church's wooden roof, which forms a triangle with its head pointing upwards, symbolising Noah's Ark.

The largest restoration of the main church in modern times took place 10 years ago. The walls, floor and parts of the marble and wood were renewed following the original lines. "We used similar white limestone blocks for the floor and the marble stairs in front of the niche are the same colour and shape of the original ones," Saleeb said.

**How to get there:** The Church of Abu Sefein is part of a complex of other ancient churches which lie 1km north of the Hanging Church. It stands approximately 150m from El-Malek El-Saleh underground Metro station.

## Balancing investment and infrastructure

Mohamed Leheita talks to Rehab Saad on the virtues of developing in the right place at the right time

The former head of the Egyptian Chamber of Tourism had much to say about future planning and development of sites in Egypt. The following are excerpts from the interview:

"Never before have tourist projects in Egypt been so soundly planned. Until recently, there was not much consideration given to planning or follow-up. Development was too fast. But now, the Ministry of Tourism has established rules and regulations to control development."

"The regulations speak of the balance that should be struck between tourist investments and infrastructure. The latter should be established even before we make a first step. Mistakes have been made in the past by investment adventures and this should be avoided."

"Unfortunately, the rules are not clear for development in some new areas. In Marsa Alam, for example, deep-sea diving is a major activity. Although the area has not been developed as a tourist destination, there should be some control over the facilities provided for divers who do come. For example, there are four boats divers use and we do not know whether they can be considered tourist establishments and whether or not they are subject to tourist law. Therefore, at any time, the police could come and confiscate the boats and the tourist would be left with a dilemma."

"There are so many places in Egypt that could be made into tourist destinations, but proper studies have to be made about their potential. For example, the New Valley could attract a lot of tourists, but is this an appropriate time to carry out major development there, when we have really not emerged from the tourist crisis?"

"There are some newly developed areas along the Red Sea coast, but have these areas been fully studied? Is there a balance between investment and environment? We should make sure of that."

"Another vitally important thing is to create an in-built system of coping with possible tourist crises. Although we have had very serious incidents including the hijacking of an aircraft from Luxor, the shooting of Greek tourists outside a Giza hotel and the leakage of oil in the Suez Gulf, such damage control has never been implemented."

"It is true that the Ministry of Tourism has risen to the occasion and has managed to counter adverse press reports, but there should be specialised working groups linked with the Ministry of Tourism with basic background information to cope with different crises, especially to disseminate accurate news before the foreign press publishes premature information. For example, when the oil leakage in the Suez Gulf reached Hurgada, an environmental catastrophe was avoided, but the Italian press got word of it and this brought down the number of Italian tourists there."

"In terms of positive developments, there is one that deserves follow-up: the creation of a consultant body in the Red Sea which includes investors and officials. No resolution can be taken in the Red Sea Governorate without the knowledge and agreement of all investors. This move has greatly encouraged investors."

"In any investment, you have to be one step ahead of everyone else. In 1991 we built one of the first tourist villages in Safage, used partly for tourist health and partly for diving and entertainment. The first step we took was studying the area's potential and, eventually, the villages became well known. The same could be done with Halaib, near the Sudanese border. A type of date grows there which has proved to be curative for diabetes. This phenomenon is known. It is part of ancient traditions. But, so far, no studies have been made on its medical properties. A concerted effort to prevent the palm trees producing these dates from becoming extinct should also be made."

"If we continue to study out-of-the-way areas that are known to be beneficial to one's health, then Egypt could exploit health tourism. Within the next 10 years, the country could attract between 5 to 7 million visitors for health reasons alone."

## Americans 'rediscover' Egypt

A recent survey of the American tourist market revealed some interesting attitudes. Omayma Abdel-Latif reports

"Egypt rediscovered" was the title of a survey, the first of its kind conducted by the American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) in Cairo, on the American tourist market. Based on a sample of 100 Americans, the survey surprisingly revealed that 60 per cent had been to Egypt more than once.

Cairo was the number one destination, according to 47 per cent of those surveyed. Luxor came second, followed by Aswan or taking a Nile cruise to Upper Egypt. Alexandria, Sharm El-Sheikh and Hurgada ranked low on the list.

The majority of travellers interviewed chose February to May as the ideal time of year to come to Egypt.

American travellers are primarily interested

in Ancient Egyptian culture, according to the survey. Visiting seaside resorts came in second, followed by business trips, scuba diving, archaeology, and visiting friends.

The survey also revealed that 36 per cent of American tourists prefer to travel with family. Travelling in a group or organized trips was the number two choice and very few Americans seemed to like the idea of travelling alone.

"This is a rare survey of American market," commented Elhamy El-Zayat, who participated in conducting the survey. "It helps us learn more about the attitudes of American travellers in order to cater to their needs as much as possible," he added. El-Zayat plans to follow up with a survey on both the Australian and New Zealand markets.



## Masterpiece of the month

THE NEWLY-discovered canopic jars, described in *Al-Ahram Weekly* issue 288, are now on display in the foyer of the Egyptian Museum as September's masterpiece. Nevine El-Aref reports.

The four alabaster canopic jars ornamented with human heads, which were discovered in a nobleman's tomb at Dahshur last month, date back to the 12th Dynasty (2000-1786 BC). Three of these canopic jars contain the remains of material used for mummification, including nitrate, sodium chloride and other chemicals, while the fourth holds the remains of internal

organs. These jars may bring Egyptologists a step closer to unravelling the secrets of mummification.

Mohamed Saleh, director general of the Egyptian Museum, said that this is not the first time that materials used for mummification have been discovered. Already in 1947, canopic jars containing chemicals for mummification were discovered but they were mixed with remains of internal body organs making them difficult to analyse. Last week's discovery of individually stored chemicals is, therefore, all the more valuable.

## How to get there

### Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet  
Super Jet stations are located in Almaza (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramses Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurgada and Sinai. Tel. 772-663.

Cairo-Alexandria  
Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 9pm; LE2 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter. A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almaza at 7.15am. Tickets from Almaza LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Marsa Matruh  
Services at 7am departure and 7pm return from Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE36.

Cairo-Sidi Abdel-Rahman  
Services at 6.30am, 7am, 8am, 9am and 3.45pm. Tickets LE32.

Cairo-Port Said  
Services every half hour from 6am to 8am; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramses Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said  
Service 6.45am, from Ramses Square in Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurgada  
Services 8am and 3pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Almaza. Departs Hurgada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm; LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurgada  
Service 8pm, from Ramses Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurgada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh  
Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

East Delta Bus Company  
Buses travel to North Sinai, South Sinai, Suez and Ismailia. Buses to

Ismailia and Suez depart from Qutali (near Ramses Square). Almaza and Tahrir Square (near Heliopolis). Buses to North and South Sinai depart from the Sinai bus station at Abbassiya Square. Tel. 483-4733.

Cairo-Ismailia  
Services every 45 minutes from 6.30am to 6pm, from Qutali, then Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE3.75; air-conditioned bus LE5.25, one way.

Cairo-Suez  
Services every half hour from 6am to 7pm, from Qutali, then Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE3.75; air-conditioned bus LE5.25, one way.

Cairo-El-Arish  
Services every hour from 7.30am to 4pm, from Qutali, then Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets deluxe bus LE3.1; air-conditioned bus LE13, one way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh  
Services every 45 min. from 7am to 6.30pm, from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets deluxe bus LE3.1; evening LE40, one way.

Cairo-Nuweiba  
Service 8am, from Abbassiya, then Almaza. Tickets deluxe bus LE3.1.

West Delta Bus Company  
Stations at Tahrir and Almaza. Tel. 243-1846.

Cairo-Hurgada  
Services 9am, noon, 3pm, 10.30pm, 11.45pm and 11pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

Cairo-Sofage  
Services 9am and 3pm. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Quaser  
Service 10pm. Tickets LE38 one way.

Cairo-Luxor  
Service 9am. Tickets LE35 one way.

Cairo-Aswan  
Service 3pm. Tickets LE30 one way.

Trains  
Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan, from Ramses

Station. Tel. 147 or 573-3333.

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan  
"French" deluxe trains with sleepers  
Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.40pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40 am and 8am, Aswan 8.40am and 10am). Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians; to Aswan LE300 for foreigners; LE141 for Egyptians.

"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers  
Services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE31; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria  
"Torbini" trains  
VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal; LE22 without a meal. Standard train: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 3pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.

Cairo-Port Said  
Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir  
There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir: Adly 390-0999; Opera 390-2444; or Hilton 759-9806.

Cairo-Luxor  
Tickets LE220 for Egyptians, LE780 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurgada  
Tickets LE338 for Egyptians, LE780 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh  
Tickets LE246 for Egyptians, LE821 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Compiled by Rehab Saad

## EGYPT AIR

Telephone numbers of EGYPT AIR offices in governorates:

Abu Simbel Sales Office:	374836-374735
Alexandria Offices: Ram:	4833357-4834778
Cleopatra:	586461-586404
Airport Office:	4218464-4227888-4282357-4281989
Aswan Office:	3158881/2/234
Airport Office:	488387-488588
Assiut Office:	323151-322711-324004-324007
Mansoura Office:	36378-363733
Hurgada Office:	443591/4
Airport Office:	442883-443597
Ismailia Office:	328937-3221958-221951/2-328936
Luxor Office:	384584/1/2/3/4
Airport Office:	384567/8
Luxor Office Karnak:	382348
Marsa Matruh Office:	934398
Menoufia Office (Sheikh El Kham):	233382-233823-233822
New Valley Office:	888/901695
Port Said Office:	224128-222874-222921
Port Said Office Karnak:	238833-239978
Sharm El Sheikh Office:	604314-604409
Airport Office:	604408
Taba Office:	068/530018-530011
Direct:	5783620
Tanta Office:	311754/311780
Zakazik Office:	349829-349830/1

هكذا من الأصل



### Kasparov plays

GARRY Kasparov was greeted warmly as a son of Armenia last Sunday, as the World Chess Olympiad opened in Yerevan, Armenia, with a record 209 teams from 127 countries competing.

Kasparov, the world's highest-ranked player and champion of the Professional Chess Association, heads a Russian team that won the last Olympiad in Moscow two years ago. The team is favoured to win again this year. Though born in Baku, the capital of neighbouring Azerbaijan, Kasparov's mother was Armenian, and consequently, his presence in the tournament is considered a source of pride for Armenians.

The crowd of 5,000 people, attending Sunday night's ceremonial opening, gave Kasparov a thunderous standing ovation when he was introduced by Kiran Lyumzhinov, president of the International Chess Federation (FIDE).

The 32nd Olympiad was formally opened by Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosian. The 14 rounds of play began Monday, with the strongest national teams playing the lowest-rated teams. Matches are set to continue through to 2 October.

Other teams expected to challenge for the top men's honours besides Russia are Great Britain, the United States, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Armenia, Ukraine, Georgia, Israel, and the Netherlands.

Georgia, China and Hungary, who finished first, second, and third respectively in the women's competition two years ago, again are expected to contend for that title.

### Tae kwon do tussle

MUSTAFA Bakr, president of the Egyptian Tae Kwon Do Federation (ETTF), said earlier last week that Egypt, the tournament's defending champion, decided to withdraw from the 3rd African Tae Kwon Do Championships after all attempts to resolve a controversy between an Egyptian player and a referee failed to be resolved.

During the competition, which was held last week in South Africa, Egypt's Mahmoud Shalabi protested against a referee's decision which left the other competitor victorious in a match between the two.

At first, ETTF officials tried to appease the international officials by suspending Shalabi and having him extend an official apology. The solution was not enough.

According to Bakr, the controversy between Shalabi and the referee was only a minor incident in comparison to the open hostility manifested by the African competitors against the Egyptian team. Bakr said the organising committee could have avoided these problems by using computer scoring instead of manual scoring methods, which led to cries of foul play and discrimination.

The tension between the athletes quickly spread to the coaching staff. In a fight between the Egyptians and their African competitors, it was reported that Egyptian national team coach Farag El-Emari had injured his arm trying to break up the fracas. Shalabi sustained cuts and bruises to his arms and face.

### Going for a world record

TWO-time Olympic champion Marie-José Perce of France won the 200-metre dash at the Tokyo International Athletics meeting and vowed to go for a new world record when she takes her explosive talent to the 400-metre hurdles next season. She will resume her training in late October, and concentrate on the technical aspects of hurdling.

### Fined for misbehaviour

ITALIAN ski star and former world champion Alberto Tomba was fined 1.5 million lira (\$1,000) for assaulting a photographer outside a discotheque in July 1995. Tomba, who was not present for the hearing, grabbed the photographer and his equipment after having his photo taken in the company of a 23-year-old woman with whom he was having an affair.

### African renaissance

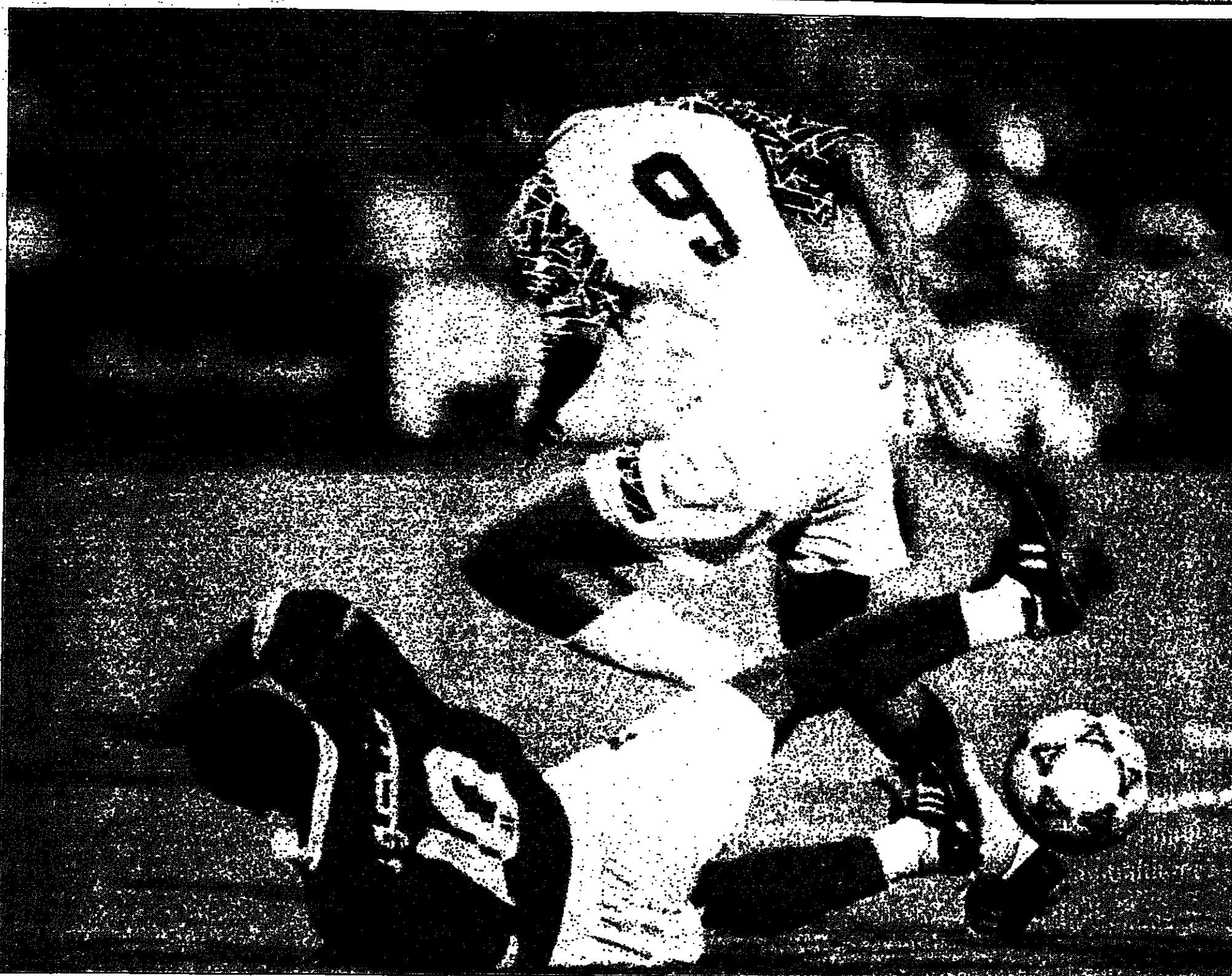
PRESIDENT Nelson Mandela set in motion a giant clock in Central Cape Town to count down the 365-days until the host city of the 2004 Olympic Games is announced. Mandela activated the eight-storey high timepiece at the Cape Town civic centre, following a parade through the city by South Africa's 1996 Atlanta Olympic and Paralympic athletes.

Cape Town is one of 11 cities bidding for the Games and the National Olympic Committee of South Africa (NOCSA) is confident that it will be among the first five when the shortlist is announced in March 1997. Other favourites for the 2004 Games include Athens, Rome, Stockholm and St Petersburg, but the NOCSA believes the Cape Town application is the "first realistic bid" from Africa.

### Medal flap

BRITISH swim star Nick Gillingham was appalled at the decision of British Olympic chiefs not to back his fight for an Atlanta Games medal last week. Gillingham finished fourth in the 200-metre breaststroke in July, but was promoted to the bronze position when Russian Andrei Korneev was disqualified after a positive drug test.

But Korneev was reinstated following a decision by the Court of Arbitration for Sport, which ruled there was not sufficient evidence to establish that the drug, bromazepam, was covered by the International Olympic Committee's medical code.



Ahli's Aliman Mansour (down) trying desperately to keep the ball from Gamal Al-Salam of Ragaa

photo: Hossam Diab

# Ahli keep the red flag flying

In brilliant form, Ahli team won the title in the 12th Arab Champions Cup at Cairo Stadium last week. Inas Mazhar and Eric Asomugha were there



Ahli rejoicing after their victory

photo: Hassan Diab

### Past Winners

- 1981- Police of Iraq
- 1984- Tarag of Saudi Arabia
- 1985- Rashid of Iraq
- 1986- Rashid of Iraq
- 1987- Rashid of Iraq
- 1988- Tarag of Saudi Arabia
- 1989- Weeded of Morocco
- 1992- Shabab of Saudi Arabia
- 1993- Taragi of Tunisia
- 1994- Helal of Saudi Arabia
- 1995- Helal of Saudi Arabia
- 1996- Ahli of Egypt

### National team selected

IN THE STANDS sat Farouq Gafar, coach of the Egyptian national team, following the match closely and taking a close interest in the Moroccan team, which includes seven national teams players. Egypt is scheduled to play Morocco next month in the African Nations Cup qualifications.

Gafar has selected 10 players from the winning Ahli side to join the national team at its training camp in France in the coming weeks. The national team now comprises 25 players: 10 from Ahli, five from Zamalek, three from Ismaili, three foreign players, and one each from Itihad of Alexandria, Mansoura, Moqawiloun and Suez. The players are: Ahmed Shobeir, Hussein El-Sayed, Essam Abdel-Azim (goalkeepers), Mohamed Youssef, Hani Ramzi, Mahmoud Abul-Dahab, Yasser Radwan, Moustaf Hanafi, Medat Abdel-Hadi, Samir Kamuna, Ibrahim Hassan (defence), Abdel-Satar Sabri, Magdi Tolba, Ismail Youssef, Tamer Abdel-Hamid, Hadi Khashaba, Hesham Hanaifi, Ahmed Hassan and Mohamed Sabri (mid-field), Hossam Hassan, Ayman Mansour, Mohamed Salah Abou Grisha, Hazem Emam, Ahmed Metwali.

### Results:

- Group 1
- Ahli-Beleida 5-1
- Rafiah-Beleida 1-0
- Group 2
- Ragaa-Helal (S.A.) 1-1
- Ragaa-Wehdat 4-0
- Ragaa-Helal (Sudan) 4-0
- Helal (S.A.)-Helal (Sudan) 0-1
- Helal S.-Wehdat 3-0
- Wehdat-Helal (Sudan) 3-2
- Semi-finals
- Ahli-Helal (S.A.) 2-1
- Ragaa-Rafiah 7-0
- Final
- Ahli-Ragaa 3-1

Best player and top scorer: Bassir Salah El-Din - 9 goals (Ragaa)  
Best goalkeeper: Ahmed Shobeir (Ahli)  
Fair play team: Shabab Raffah

There was a frenzied atmosphere at the Cairo Stadium on Sunday night as Ahli fans watched their team storm to a 3-1 victory over Ragaa of Morocco in the final of the Arab Champions Cup. Plenty of distinguished figures joined the 90,000 crowd in the stadium, including Prime Minister Kamel Ganzouri, HRH Prince Faisal Bin Fahd, president of the Arab Football Federation, and Abdel-Monim Emara, head of the Egyptian Supreme Council for Youth and Sports.

The two-goal difference belied the fact that the match was neck and neck, till the last, most of the way through. "It was a tough game," accepted coach Reiner Hollman of Ahli, "We respect Ragaa and relied on discipline to win."

The great thing about the championship matches, including the final, was the non-partisan spirit in which they were played. It was not only Ahli fans that showed up at the stadium for the final. The stands reflected the various colours of all Egyptian teams — Zamalek's white and Ismaili's yellow joining Ahli's red. But once the champs were crowned and the fans were out of the stadium, the streets became a sea of red.

The championship had proved to be full of surprises, as underdogs rose and giants were slaughtered. In Group A, Rafiah of Palestine made it to the

semi-finals where they met Ahli following a surprise 1-0 defeat of Bilida of Algeria. In Group B, upsets kept analysts in suspense until the last of the group matches. But in the end Ragaa of Morocco clinched their place in the final with a resounding 5-0 defeat of Sudan's Helal.

The defeat wiped out the hope of the Sudanese league champions, who had done well to beat the two-times champions, Helal of Saudi Arabia, 1-0 fielding only 10 men. But the star-studded Saudis were not ready to give in so easily. They outplayed Wehdat of Jordan 3-0 to secure a semi-final berth.

Ragaa had no problems beating Rafiah of Palestine 7-0 in the first semi-final match. But the real contest, and some said, the final before the final, was between Ahli and Helal of Saudi Arabia. Encounters between the two countries' clubs have always been battle of the titans and this was no exception.

Helal took the lead in the 15th minute, from an opportunity provided by red card victim Youssef Al-Tamman. In the 18th minute, Ahmed Koshari equalised. The stalemate was only broken by Ahli's Ahmed Nakhl's golden goal in extra time. The result did not go down with the Helal, who blamed the Syrian referees, Gamal El-Sherif, for the loss.

In the final with Ragaa, Ahli began with a first minute surprise attack. Reds Abdel-Aal took a long

range shot which was deflected past the posts by the goalkeeper. Magdi Tolba took the corner, and in a classic football moment, curled the ball in a superb corner kick straight into the net for the first goal. It was two minutes since kick-off. This put the fans in a jubilant mood, but it was short-lived.

The fast-playing Moroccans maintained the pressure and in the 17th minute, Ahli's goalie and team captain Ahmed Shobeir made a million dollar save. Having beaten the offside trap, the Helal player was in a world of his own with only Shobeir to contend with. It was an opportunity on a plate — and a save to match. But 11 minutes later, Moroccan star striker Bassir Salaheddin, made a spectacular run between the Ahli defenders from the midfield before planting the ball into the net for the equaliser.

The game gathered momentum, with both teams launching attacks at intervals. Ahli played the ball between Hesham Hanafi, Ibrahim Hassan and Reds Abdel-Aal, looking for a hole in the Ragaa defence so they could re-establish their lead. But Ragaa replied to every move, with Gharidou Abdel-Latif and Gamal Al-Sallami doing a good job and always managing to find Nazir Abdel-Karim and Bassir Salaheddin with their long, high passes.

Forecasting the danger ahead, coach Hollman came off the bench to warn the Ahli defence to beware. In

the second half, he made three changes, the most opportune being the replacement of Reds Abdel-Aal by Walid Salaheddin. In the fourth minute of the second half, Salaheddin was brought down in the penalty box, and Hadi Khashaba converted the penalty into a goal.

The Moroccans refused to give up and relentlessly pursued an equaliser. The closest chance was in the 38th minute, when Abdel-Karim's shot narrowly missed the sidebar.

The final blow came in the 44th minute, when Walid Salaheddin, in a heroic and brilliant move, managed to draw the entire opposition defence, including the goalkeeper, out of the box. With consummate skill, he was able to slip back into the box, and hammer the ball into the net to solidify Ahli's win.

The fans went wild, and as they poured out of the stadium, buses, minibuses, taxis and private cars soon became full to capacity with red-flag waving crowds, a large body of which escorted the team's bus on its journey downtown.

The aim to dominate Arab football had been more or less given up by Egyptian teams. Ahli is only the third Egyptian club to participate in the tournament following in the footsteps of Tersana in 1987 and Ismaili in 1992. By this victory, Ahli, and Egypt, found themselves a firm foothold in the Arab game.

# Squash hits Gezira

Egypt's second international squash championship in 3 months has thrown open the gate for more Egyptian players to join the professionals circuit around the world. Eman Abdel-Moeti reports

The outlook for Egyptian squash continues to shine as the Gezira Sporting Club sponsors its first international squash championship. The competition, which opened last Friday, hosts the largest contingent of Egyptian players in the annals of international squash championship history.

Ahmed Barada and the rest of the national team — Amir Wagih, Omar El-Brolosy, Mohamed Midhat Morsi, Ahmed Faizy, Karim El-Mistikawi, Emad Kiratoun, Mohamed Abbass, and Mohamed Abdel-Salam — will be joined in the championship by players from Gezira Sporting Club, Shams Club, and Al-Ahli Club.

Faizy world-ranked 36th, and Brolosy world-ranked 45th drew wild cards from the World Professional Squash Association (WPSA) to enter the main draw leaving Barada, world-ranked 13th, and Wagih, ranked 26th to meet in the second round.

Pakistani squash star Jansher Khan is expected to try to avenge his defeat two weeks ago in the Hong Kong Open by Rodney Eyles. Khan, who bested Barada to win the Al-Ahram Open three months ago, will have to produce his best to prevail against the determination of competitors such as Simon Parke, world-ranked five, holding on fiercely following his recent recovery from cancer.

Coming closely on the heels of the Al-Ahram Squash Open, the championship is the second international squash competition to take place in Egypt this year. Officials are confident that the Gezira Squash Open will raise the profile of Egyptian players in the sport and will prove to be beneficial to promoting squash in Egypt.

WPSA director of competition, Sheila Copley is certain squash in Egypt will continue its upward trend. "Egypt has all the ingredients to be one of the leading countries in squash; it's got suitable venues, professional players, and experienced competition organisers," she said.

Gezira sporting officials, inspired by the success of tennis competitions at the club are offering a total of \$70,000 in prize money. The kitty is the second largest in Egypt after the \$100,000 given out at the Al-Ahram Open earlier this year.

The Gezira organising committee headed by Abdel-Aziz El-Shafel, determined that the club's tennis centre court with its 5,000 spectator capacity was the ideal venue for the event. The competitions are taking place in the same portable glass-court this was set up by the Pyramids of Giza for the A-Ahram Open.

During his visit to the WPSA in England, El-Shafel recruited three British technicians to come to Egypt to reconstruct the court. The technicians discovered that the court's storage at the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports was inadequate and recommended that a more suitable facility be found.



Amir Wagih and Ahmed Barada in another encounter

photo: Salah Ibrahim

Edited by Inas Mazhar



## Robert Mabro:

## Recovering Alexandria

What to eat for breakfast, and why the modern world needs a philosopher: two typical questions, when one is an engineer, was almost a priest, and is an economist, but especially when one is from here, there and everywhere



On 7 March, Robert Mabro the Alexandrian went to Buckingham Palace to receive a medal from Queen Elizabeth II. Mabro, the founder and director of the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, and fellow of St Antony's College, was made a Commander of the British Empire (CBE) — one of very few Arabs to have received such a distinguished decoration.

His story is one of many surprises and sharp turns. Born to a family of Lebanese origin, people sometimes shouted at him on the streets of Alexandria: "Hello, Khawaga!" He would insult them in return. When he went to live in England he did the opposite, and insisted that he was a *khawaga*. His purpose was to study economics, but it was not exactly the average "study abroad" story. Before that, many things had happened, including a career in civil engineering and four years of theological and philosophical studies at a Jesuit seminary. "A life without contradictions is as tasteless as boiled courgettes," he opines.

Both his grandfathers were part of the 19th-century wave of migration from Greater Syria. Originating in Tripoli, their trade took them to Alexandria, where they settled. His father's father, Nicolas Mabro, was a tobacco merchant who married from the Khlat family, another big Tripoli family. The rumour that Robert is Greek has its origin in the fact that his grandfather obtained Greek protection on the basis of his commercial dealings with Greece. Mabro suggests, half-jokingly, that his Greek-sounding surname may have facilitated this arrangement. He remarks that the funny thing about the protection system which many Jewish and Christian merchants sought in order to protect their interests in case of disputes with local merchants was that it was possible to find five brothers, for example, with five different "nationalities". "My grandfather was 'Greek'. His brother was 'French', and their nephew was 'German'," he explains.

But the Ottoman Empire, that world of fluid boundaries and flexible "nationalities" in which the grandfather lived, was very different from the world of nationalism and colonialism that Robert grew up in. "That was a time when Egyptians were asking for independence and they were rather strict about who was to be considered a real Egyptian. But also the majority of the *Shawam* (Greater Syrians) were a bit Westernised. The kids in the street used to call me *khawaga*, and I used to insult them. After a while, those who knew me stopped calling me that, but others who didn't continued to use that word and I continued to insult them. I have to say all this needed some struggling, and it used to bother me."

Robert Mabro is a nightmare for those who are into slotting and labeling. They will not get anywhere, especially in his presence. In fact, he welcomes those types, but only to amuse himself and appease his insatiable appetite for mischief. "He

will take them to the water and bring them back thirsty," as the proverb goes — very thirsty in fact. There is, however, one pigeon-hole in which Robert Mabro would gladly be slotted: he is an Alexandrian Egyptian. One thing he will not joke about or make light of is his passion for Egyptian Alexandria, *Iskandariya Al-Masrayiyya* (Alexandria, the Egyptian), as he likes to call it.

The Alexandria he grew up in was a place for everyone, yet it was undoubtedly an Egyptian city. What bothers him is the way Alexandria has been appropriated by Europeans; "cosmopolitan Alexandria" was a way of stealing the city from the Egyptians to whom it belonged. He argues that "foreigners" who were born and raised in Alexandria were not responsible for this imagined and imaginary construction. "You would not find any foreigner who was born and raised in Alexandria who did not feel that the city was essentially Egyptian. The ones who created the impression that Alexandria was a cosmopolitan (as in Western) city are those authors and writers who did not actually live there. They just visited, and when they looked around, they found a mix of people who spoke different languages. They then produced their beautiful writings, like *Khawaga* Durrell and so on. The idea of cosmopolitanism is an attractive one for Europeans because they do not have this: the English is English, the French is French and the German is German. At that time you did not find a mixture of people together in one city except for New York and Alexandria, and perhaps Istanbul. So it was kind of exciting for them."

Mabro does not deny that there was actually something special about the city, but this "cosmopolitan" character had a brief history, and even at its height it did not represent the culture of the city as a whole. "I am not saying that this character did not exist, nor that it is unimportant. What I am saying is that the concern and interest in this 'cosmopolitan' character came at the expense of the Egyptian part, about which you find almost nothing's been done. When I read in French and English books that Cavafy is 'the poet of the city' I get furious. Well, I've read every line Cavafy wrote. He does not write about the modern city. It is all about Roman Alexandria. Who is the real 'poet of Alexandria'? Undoubtedly Bairam El-Tunsi, not Cavafy. Bairam has no mention in Western writing except for one study at Oxford University by Marilyn Booth. Yes, Cavafy is a great poet, but he could have been anywhere: Tunis, Athens, Paris, Vienna."

Mabro speaks with anger about the inexplicable gap in the study of the modern history of Alexandria. "The more I read the more furious I get. Books are full of writings about *Shawam*, Armenians, Jews, Greeks and nothing about Egyptians... how is that possible? They claim that Alexandria was created by foreigners, but in fact it was created by the Egyptian *fellahin*. At the time of

Mohamed Ali, they were the ones who built the arsenal and the port and dug the Mahmudiya Canal, without which there could have not been the Alexandria we know. Foreigners came later: they built some villas and brought some trade, and that's all. You would find records about even the most insignificant of foreigners. You come to Egyptians, you find nothing. But we must search, and if there are no records we have to resort to oral history."

Four years ago, Robert Mabro started his "Alexandria collection", motivated by his desire to remain busy. "One always needs something to occupy oneself with. Also, when one grows older, nostalgia always attacks. I lived in Alexandria for 26 years and I have been away from it for 35 years. Although I visit very often, I still needed something to make me feel close to it when I am away. That's how I thought of 'collecting'. I collect books, maps, antiques, postcards... whatever I find. I also collect things written about it or things written by people from Alexandria."

But we should not believe him when he adds modestly that "this is just collecting; it is neither here nor there." He is far from being the possessive collector whose sole interest is to acquire and stack rare objects before others do. For him, the collection is only important insofar as it would assist his project of recovering the history of Egyptian Alexandria. He started by writing a piece about Bulkeley, the place where he was born. "There is only one idea in this piece: that despite Bulkeley being the area with the greatest foreign presence, it could not have survived without Egyptians. My memories were that the street was an Egyptian street. This is what I wrote about Bulkeley, and this is what I want to be done on Alexandria as a whole."

Robert Mabro's background is not the only aspect of his life that cannot be rendered in one sentence. The development of his career is no less intriguing. Although he had wanted to study medicine, the first degree of this renowned economist was in civil engineering. He graduated from Alexandria (then Farouk) University in 1956, and started practicing straight away. Even before the results were out, one of his professors approached him for a job with one of his acquaintances who was a contractor. "At that time we did not have money, as my father was a small employee. When I heard that I was to receive a monthly salary of 30 pounds, at a time when my pocket money was one pound a week, I jumped at the opportunity. I started in Alexandria, then the contractor sent me to Belbeis where he had a contract for building officers' houses. I stayed there for one year, then I was transferred to Damour to supervise a building site." This assignment was a turning point in the life of the young engineer. It led him to quit engineering — forever. He faced many problems and difficult situations which his youth and university education had not prepared him to deal

with. "I can say that, in all my life, the time when I really learned something about people and about real life were the five years I worked with that contractor. My colleague was a thief, my direct supervisor was a thief, the owner of the company was a thief, his brother was a thief and his partner was a thief, and they used to steal from each other. I fell into despair, and one day, I just left and headed to the Jesuits in Cairo, and told them I wanted to be a priest. I was 26. People who knew me were justifiably shocked; for I was not that involved in religion — at least not to the extent of going into a monastery. I acted on impulse, and the move was inexplicable, even for me."

In 1960, the Jesuits sent him to France for training, and he spent four years studying philosophy in a seminary near Paris. Although he liked philosophy, he finally reached the conclusion that he was in the wrong place. "I told them that and they told me you can leave if you want, but is there nothing else you would like to learn? I said well, I like this philosophy very much but I can't earn a living with it. I studied engineering at home but I don't think that what I learned would be of any use here. What I think I would like to do is study economics." They then sent him to London to study economics at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). After two years he was quite sure he was never really going to be a priest, and he left the Jesuits. "I found myself in London, unattached to the seminary, and with an MA in economics, with an Engineering B.Sc. from Egypt and some philosophy from the seminary." He worked in the SOAS department of economics as a researcher for two years. This is where he met Judy, who was to become his wife in 1967.

One day in 1969, he received a surprise phone call from the late Albert Hourani, who was at the time the director of the Middle East Centre at St Antony's College, Oxford, asking to meet him for lunch. Not yet used to "the English way of saying important things," Mabro was baffled when Hourani told him: "We shall soon be advertising a position in Oxford. I would hate it if you didn't notice that." He did notice it, and was selected for the job, becoming a fellow of St Antony's. It was at that time that he wrote his authoritative book on the Egyptian economy, in addition to a work on the industrialisation of Egypt. His academic interests were not confined to Egypt, but extended to other areas of the Middle East, and included his work on small industries in Iran and labour in Libya. His interest gradually shifted to the issues of oil and energy, and before long he became one of the world's authorities on the subject for which the former priest and engineer is best known today.

The simplicity with which Mabro tells his story should not leave anyone with the impression that things just "happen to him". He is in fact someone who chooses his initiatives carefully. On this, the founder and director of the Oxford Institute for En-

ergy Studies says: "In some things I am smart, in other things I am an idiot. But yes, if I put my head to something I have to do it. Otherwise, would I have been able to create the institute?"

"Before the institute, I established something called the Energy Club in 1976. When it worked, I started the annual September seminar in 1979. Then I thought: now there is the Club where people meet and talk... there has to be a place where people can think and produce ideas. This is where the idea of the Institute came from. I worked on it for three years, and it opened in 1983. I conducted lengthy negotiations with the Arabs, Japanese and French, and each had a different approach and interest. I think that my experience in dealing with different people in very difficult circumstances on the building sites has taught me to approach more efficiently the simpler problems that I have encountered in the academic world and in civilised British society."

One decision he took when he first arrived in Britain put him at ease with himself and spared him many of the agonising questions that others in his position constantly confront. "I realised very quickly that however much I twisted my tongue, I would not be English, so I made a decision that I will not try to be English: I will be myself — a *khawaga*. In Egypt it used to infuriate me to be called a *khawaga*, and I used to fight back. In England my attitude has been the opposite: yes, I am a *khawaga*. If you accept me like that, fine. If not, then goodbye. I adopted the opposite policy and it worked. But also when I took this decision, I became at ease with myself: I don't keep asking myself these identity questions: are you English, Egyptian, Greek... philosopher, engineer or what?... I did not bother... I am what I am... I am everything."

Robert Mabro has two daughters, Nevine and Nayla, who have recently finished their BAs in politics and history. When faced with difficult decisions, the only people he consults are his daughters, and 90 per cent of the time he gets opinions that are "wise, shrewd and powerful". His wife Judy is a writer and editor, and her anthology of European perceptions of Middle Eastern women in the 19th century, published under the title *Veiled Half-Truths*, has recently been reprinted. One thing he learned from his father guides his relationship to his family: his respect for personal freedom.

Robert Mabro's dreams for the future are to retire without financial difficulty and to write five books: "I want to write a book on Egyptian Alexandria, a book on the interpretation of Christianity as I see it, a book on corruption, a recipe book for breakfast, and an essay entitled: 'Why the modern world needs a philosopher.'"

Profile by Reem Saad

## Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris

◆ Oh dears, what a hectic week I just had! And there are no signs of it slowing down. It all started on a rather serious note with yours truly attending Valerie Hammond's workshop on Women in Management at the Information and Support Centre at the World Trade Centre organised by the British Council in cooperation with UNICEF. The whole thing sounded so professional. I decided I owed it to myself to attend in view of the fact that I am so great at organising everybody's affairs. As always, I did well following my instincts. Valerie's work on cultural change aiming at increasing the quality and quantity of women in the work force was positively uplifting. Like me, Valerie recognises that there is no limit to women's potential.

◆ The conference was hardly finished than I was on my way to Agamy to attend the last luncheon of the season at Maxie and Mona Makhlouf's where the tout Agamy in their casual best, came to bid the season goodbye while feasting on Maxie's



(L. to R.) Valerie Hammond and Mr and Mrs Cardinal; Said and Amal; Ahmed Zaki and Nesrine Sadek.

gastronomical delights topped by a splendid *fir meshaltet* complete with trimmings which, as you all know, include heavy cream and molasses. Mona who is divinely slim explained that all you have to do while gorging yourself is "think slim". That way she says, you never put weight on. Well I shall try to give her a few penicils for her own thoughts because mine have not been working. I must say that all I saw was a green apple on Mona's plate but I don't think it has anything to do with the way she looks. No matter. Plump women have a *je ne sais quoi* that is appreciated by the connoisseurs.

◆ It was time to satisfy other penchants of my eclectic nature and having donned my *rive gauche* jeans and silk shirt I made an appearance at the Centre of Arts, where Mounir Kanaan's exhibition was held under the auspices of our Minister of Culture Farouk Hosni and hosted by Dr Ahmed Nawar, head of the National Centre of Fine Arts and

artist Ahmed Fouad Selim, the general director of the centre. Once again, by simply following my instincts, I found out that I was at the right place at the right time.

◆ Another hop, skip and a jump and a change of plumes of course and there I was, congratulating my good friend Nesrine Sadek, public relation director of the Cairo Sheraton on the splendid cocktail reception she organised to celebrate the final day of the Experimental Theatre Festival. And what a finale it was! My other good friend theatre director Ahmed Zaki beamed the whole evening through while Francisco Javier, president of the International Institute of the Argentinian Theatre and Martha Col Gney, director of the International Theatre of the United States did not look one bit less pleased. Actually, rubbing shoulders with all these actors got me thinking: Have I been too shy about my own talent? I decided there and then to do some experimenting of my own. Who knows, maybe at the next festival they will announce that a new star has been born. But all this was last week dear and the best is still



◆ to come. Wait until you hear this: The Alvin Ailey troupe will be performing in Cairo from 24 to 29 September including two matinees at the Cairo Opera House. I for one, plan to attend every single performance. Before opening night however, I shall be attending, with the chosen few, a dinner hosted by Mr and Mrs Tammes Jr, counselor at the Embassy of the US for press and cultural affairs and Mr and Mrs Surinder Mand, general manager of Philip Morris in

honour of Judith Jamison, artistic director of Alvin Ailey Dance Theatre. Well, if you had seen Judith performing her tour de force *Solo* you would understand what I am raving about and why I spend sleepless nights awaiting the minute when I will be able to express my undying admiration. Incidentally, *Solo* is going to be performed in Cairo this time. I hope to be able to harness my enthusiasm long enough to tell Judith about a small dance I choreographed myself in my youth not so long ago and which earned me several encores from my extended family a few *Sham El-Nessim* ago. Maybe Judith will want to include it in her repertoire.

◆ Well dears, it is not only my family who is given a chance to enjoy a

display of my numerous talents. Why, only the other day, or night should I say, at the wedding of our very own Said, I stunned the guests with an original rendition of an Umm Kalthum old favourite. Later Amal, Said's bride graciously joined me and together we made this wedding party a night to remember.

### Ministry of Culture Foreign Cultural Relations The Egyptian Centre for International Cultural Cooperation

The Centre is organising a twelve month course in Arabic, starting September 30, 1996.

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For more details, please contact the centre,

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